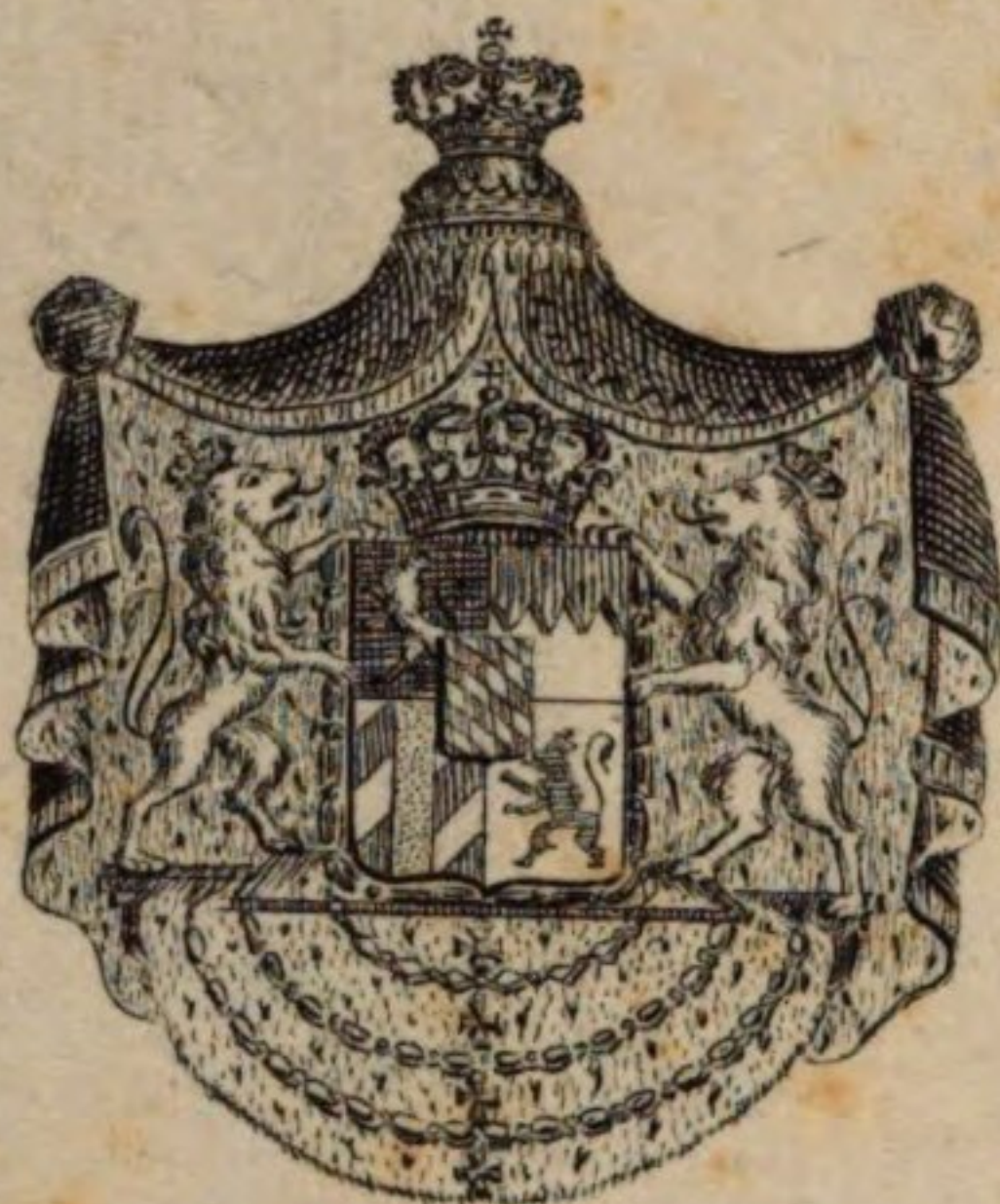




L. O. Angl.
257 d - 30



BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS.

NEW BRITISH MUSEUM



LONDON:
PRINTED FOR COLLEGE AND BENTLEY
AND SEELEY AND CO. LTD.

THE
NEW BRITISH NOVELIST;

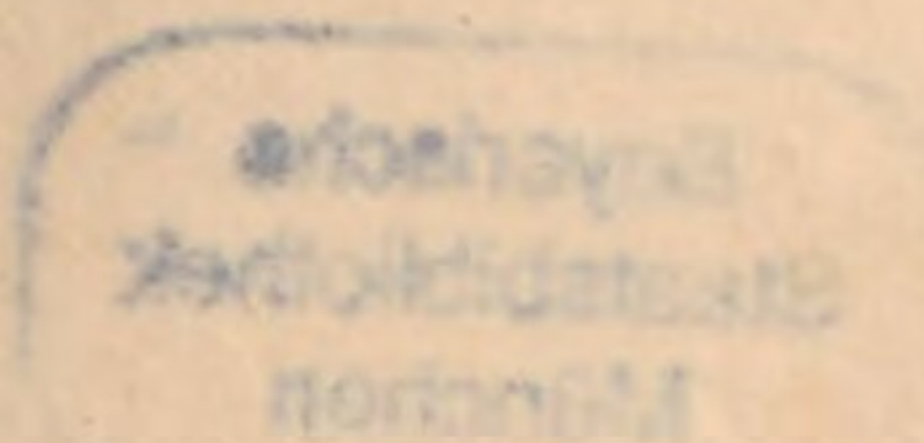
COMPRISING
WORKS

BY THE
**MOST POPULAR AND FASHIONABLE WRITERS
OF THE PRESENT DAY.**

IN FIFTY VOLUMES.

VOL. XXX.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR COLBURN AND BENTLEY,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.



NEW BRITISH NOVELIST

W. B. E. B. E.

THE NEW BRITISH NOVELIST

VOL. XXV

Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München

GERTRUDE.

CHAPTER I.

Puisqu'à la fin j'ai gagné le rivage,
Plus je ne rentre aux dangers du naufrage,
Car on ne plaint le malheur du nocher
Qui deux fois heurte à un même rocher.

PASSERAT.

THESE lines occurred to Gertrude's mind, as she found herself seated beside the young monarch. She felt, indeed, that the Duke of Beaumont possessed an interest in her heart, over which she feared that time would have no power; nor was this interest lessened by the discovery of his identity with the hero whose image had filled her imaginations, even from her earliest

years ; for, whatever his conduct towards herself, she could not deny towards his Majesty's public virtues that tribute of admiration of which the Duke of Beaumont might not have been worthy. On her other side sat Theophilus Viand, the poet, so renowned in that day for the wittiness of his impromptus, and the gallantry of his extempore effusions, and whose high-flown conversation Gertrude found of great benefit, whilst she considered what her conduct towards King Henry ought in future to be. She regretted the necessity which seemed to exist for concealing his visit to Frontenaye, and especially that she had not informed the Duchess of the circumstance ; feeling that she thus established, as it were, a tacit agreement between King Henry and herself, with regard to silence upon that topic.

Meanwhile, the young King's embarrassment nearly equalled her own ; and not all the raillery of his fair neighbour, Madame de Sauves, could extract from him a single gay reply. Although accustomed to the easy morality of the French

women of that day, but especially of those forming the court of Queen Catherine de Medicis, he could not but perceive that the young Countess de Frontenaye was a person of a superior and totally different species. Instead, therefore, of his usual easy manner of addressing the ladies of the court, with a perfect certainty of a favourable reception, he was surprised to find himself restrained by a respect totally unknown to him, before his acquaintance with Gertrude.

Whilst he was revolving in his own mind how he might enter into conversation with her, and in what terms it would be possible for him to explain away and obtain forgiveness for the deception he had practised upon her, he was startled by Madame de Sauves saying suddenly to him in a low voice, and with a malicious smile—“What does your Majesty think of the Countess de Frontenaye?”

“Nay, in sooth,” answered he, with an air of confusion, “I have scarce had time to look at the young Countess yet.”

“It is astonishing,” said Madame de Sauves ironically, “how one’s eyes may in truth be fixed upon vacancy, when they have all the appearance of being directed towards a particular object.—Pray, Lady de Frontenaye, have you observed that peculiarity in his Majesty’s eyes?”

Gertrude started from her reverie: she turned towards Madame de Sauves, and met the eyes of King Henry. Those dark eloquent eyes were fixed upon her, with an expression which seemed to beseech her forgiveness. Hers sank beneath them. Madame de Sauves smiled ironically. Gertrude tried to recover from her confusion; when it was increased to no small degree, by the Queen-Mother suddenly exclaiming, “Where was your Majesty on the night of the tempest? Most extraordinary reports are afloat concerning you. Some say, that you and Monsieur de Rosny took shelter for the night in a haunted castle, and that, on your return home, you were robbed by a party of gipsies.—I pray you, Sire, recount your ghostly adventures.”

Gertrude waited breathlessly for King Henry's reply.

"For once, report has not lied, Madam," replied he. "I was indeed storm-staid, in an enchanted castle, about, it may be, a day's journey from Avignon."

"To whom did it belong?" cried the Princess Catherine, eagerly.

"Was it really haunted?" said the Princess of Condé.

"Did you *see* any ghosts?" said Madame de Sauves.

"I saw an apparition," said King Henry, gravely.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried all the ladies.

"Go on!" said Madame Catherine, impatiently.

"It was midnight," said the King, "when methought the vision of an angel appeared to me—so fair, so unearthly, that I fell down in adoration, as in the presence of a superior being.—But, instead of receiving my humble adoration favourably," continued King Henry, "me-

thought the vision smiled upon me for a moment, but passed away. I left the chateau the next morning."

"What improbable tale is his Majesty conjuring up, to divert the fancies of these women, withal?" whispered D'Aubigné.

"It was but a dream, then!" said Madame Catherine, looking disappointed.

"Nay," said the King, "so vivid was it at the moment, that I could have sworn it to be reality."

"Console yourself, Sire," said Madame de Sauves; "the vision smiled, although it passed away."

"And did your Majesty meet with a party of Bohemians?" said D'Aubigné, "or was that the finale of the dream?"

"*Morbleu!*" said Henry, more gaily. "I encountered a light-fingered gypsy-woman, who contrived to rob me of several articles; light-fingered and swift of foot she was, in good sooth. Rosny, your groom Magnan can certify to this part of my adventure.—But have you heard,"

said he, anxious to change the conversation, “the elegant impromptu wherewith Monsieur Viand greeted me, or rather my steed, when he met me returning on your little black Spanish jennet? Repeat it, Monsieur; I have a bad memory for poetry.”

Monsieur Viand turned his eyes to the ceiling, and murmured—

“Gentil cheval, joli cheval,
Doux au montoir, doux au descendre,
Bien plus petit que Bucéphale,
Tu portes plus grand qu’Alexandre.”

“Charming, charming!” said all the ladies, except Gertrude.

“Well,” said the Baroness de Rochepot, in a low tone, to Madame de la Guiche, “I am glad all the company are so easily satisfied with this account of *the vision*. I would wager my diamond necklace against your Grace’s aigrette, that his Majesty was haunted by a tangible phantom.—Did you observe the confusion of the young Countess? She changed colour as often as a cameleon, while the King was speaking.”

“A fortunate circumstance, Madam,” said D’Aubigné sarcastically, looking at the well-rouged cheeks of the Baroness; “one sees, in that case, that her complexion is not bought.”

“Bought!” exclaimed Monsieur Ronsard. “Holy Virgin! what profanation! her colour resembles the first rosy cloud, faint but lovely, which we perceive in the East, the harbinger of the young Aurora:—or when, as now, her cheeks assume a more brilliant dye, methinks their hue appears like the evanescent crimson clouds which flit over the face of a summer heaven, when the God of Day is finishing his course.”

“Very poetical, truly! Monsieur Ronsard,” said the Baroness, angrily; “but whereas the crimson clouds you talk of receive their colour from the God of Day, it seems to me probable, that a mere mortal has produced that effect upon the complexion of the Countess at this moment.”

Gertrude had, indeed, been too short a time at Court to have learnt the art of concealing her feelings when taken by surprise, as on the

present occasion. She felt relieved that the story had passed as a jest; yet displeased that the King of Navarre should, in her presence, keep up this appearance of mystery with regard to his stay at Frontenaye; thus seeming to consider, that a secret understanding subsisted between them. Just as the last observation of the Baroness had drawn the attention not only of Madame de la Guiche, but of various other ladies, to Gertrude's embarrassment, Preciosa, with an awkwardness of which she was seldom guilty, overturned a whole goblet of *Chateau-Margaux* into the lap of Madame de Rochepot, who started up with something resembling an execration, shaking her gown *couleur fleur de pêcher*, with a countenance expressive of the deepest despair and anger. Preciosa made a thousand apologies. Every one was occupied in assisting the Baroness. The Queen observed that it was morning, and the pages appeared with lights. Gertrude had dropped a glove; King Henry presented it to her; she bowed coldly, and followed Madame Catherine. In a

few minutes, Lady de Frontenaye found herself established in an elegant boudoir, the windows of which opened into the gardens of the Louvre. The Duchess wished her good-night, saying she had need of repose after her journey, and might rest in the conviction of having ensured a disturbed sleep to hundreds.

In the solitude of her chamber, Gertrude tried to collect her scattered thoughts. A member of the Navarre court, she must in future be exposed to daily opportunities of seeing King Henry, and that, not in the cold ceremony of a court circle, but in the interior of his domestic establishment. She considered his conduct towards herself, which at once excited her surprise and indignation ; and the more she reflected upon it, the more incomprehensible it appeared to her. For a moment, she thought of consulting the Duchess upon the line of conduct most proper for her to pursue ; but, although naturally of an open and confiding disposition, Gertrude had been so long accustomed to keep her feelings concealed within her own bosom, that she shrank from the idea

of making a confidant of one who was a stranger to her: she tried to convince herself that she would, in a short space of time, become totally indifferent with regard to the King of Navarre, and that, forgetting she had ever known him as a private individual, her sentiments for him would become those which patriotism must inspire towards a magnanimous public character. “As the Duke of Beaumont,” thought she, “I can but consider him as one who has twice deceived me, and who, in declaring his pretended love for me, basely insulted an unprotected girl, and violated the laws of hospitality. He may be a glorious hero—he may be generous, amiable, and even what the world calls honourable; but my private feelings towards him must ever remain those of dislike; or may, perchance, in time, soften into indifference.”

She thought of resigning her situation, and returning to Frontenaye; but what she imagined to be pride, soon banished the idea; and, secure in her own strength, and unconscious of

the true state of her mind, Gertrude came to the resolution of behaving to the King of Navarre with respectful coldness, when obliged to endure his presence, and of henceforward banishing all thoughts of him when absent.

Few things are easier than to form a good resolution—nothing more difficult, in some cases, than to keep it. The next morning, Gertrude awoke from a troubled slumber, during which the image of King Henry had never left her mind. At one time, he had appeared to her as the Duke of Beaumont, and she walked with him over fields enamelled with flowers and verdure; and she fancied that the Abbot of the Augustine monastery came forth to meet him, clothed in white robes, and, placing a gold crown upon his head, hailed him King of France and Navarre. And then again he was the Troubadour, and she sat with him in the pleasure-boat, and together they glided down the placid river. But a storm arose, and the frail bark was overturned; and the thunder pealed, and the lightning flashed brightly; and the Spanish

girl appeared in the clouds, singing to her lute in a loud strain of triumph.

As she thought over all the fantastic visions of the night, she perceived King Henry walking in the gardens, leaning on the arm of his friend, Monsieur de Rosny. She was summoned to the apartment of Madame Catherine, and, on descending, found the Princess at her toilette, attended by Mesdames de la Guiche and de Neufvy. She was installed in her new office, and instructed by Madame de la Guiche in all the necessary rules of etiquette.

Having engaged for her nephew a tutor recommended by Father Anselmo, and taken lodgings for him in that quarter of Paris where the colleges were situated, she brought him to take leave of Madame Catherine. The Princess, captivated with the child's beauty, would scarcely consent to part with him.

"Will you be my chevalier, Sir?" said she.

"Yes," said the boy, "I like you, Madame; but not the big Italian queen whom I saw yesterday."

“Hush !” said the Princess.

“Nor the tall dark man who was with her.”

“That was her confessor, child,” said Madame Catherine. “He will put you in the Inquisition, should he overhear you.”

“There is the Duke of Beaumont !” cried the boy, springing from her arms as he caught a glimpse of King Henry from the window ; and running down the staircase, he flew out to meet his Majesty, who received him with open arms.

“Strange !” said the Princess, “that the child should know my brother’s former title.”

“How, Madame,” said Gertrude, “his Majesty’s former title !”

“Yes,” said Madame, “he was first styled Duke of Beaumont, then Prince of Viane, now King of Navarre.”

“Let us hope,” said Madame de Neufvy, “that his Majesty will change his title once more.”

“Nay, ladies, no treason, I pray you,” said the Princess, but without looking mortally offended.

“He was formerly called Duke of Beaumont,” said Gertrude to herself; “his plan of disguise could not then be very deeply laid, when the concealment of his rank merely depended upon my ignorance of a well-known fact.”

When the toilette of the Princess was completed, they adjourned to the great hall, where Catherine de Medicis and her ladies of honour were assembled. The Queen had gone to mass, attended by the Duchess de Montbazon. Some of the ladies were embroidering, others playing on the lute and singing; some practising the steps of a new ballet, and others engaged in a low conversation, seasoned by many scandalous anecdotes. Gertrude sat down to her embroidery-frame behind Madame Catherine, who, after listening rather impatiently to several sounds of suppressed laughter proceeding from a corner of the room where sat the Demoiselles Agielle and Tremouille—

“I pray you, young ladies,” said she, “initiate me in the cause of your mirth; I would by no means lose a pleasant anecdote.”

The young ladies looked at each other, as if each wished her companion to be the narrator ; and Madame de Sauves, whom nothing embarrassed, exclaimed, “ I will tell her Royal Highness :—it is a story of D'Aubigné's. The King of Navarre was in his apartment the other morning, when Monsieur de Rosny came into the antechamber, wishing to see his Majesty on some pressing affair. He was informed that the King was particularly occupied, and could see no one. Rosny, much out of humour, determined to discover the nature of his Majesty's occupation.—Your Royal Highness knows the little window which looks into the private staircase leading to his Majesty's cabinet. He planted himself there, and could hear a female voice loudly reproaching the King. In a short time, he saw the door open gently, and a lady, dressed in green, issued from the cabinet, her face so muffled up that our philosopher could not recognize her ; though we may conjecture pretty near the truth. A short time after, the King sent for him ; and Rosny found him

walking up and down his cabinet, with an appearance of great discomposure, which he endeavoured to conceal. ‘Good morning, Rosny!’ said he; ‘how are you this morning?’ ‘I am well, Sire,’ replied Rosny, ‘and always your Majesty’s humble servant. But your Majesty is not looking quite in such good health as usual?’ ‘It is true,’ replied the King; ‘I have, in fact, had a good deal of fever about me this morning—but I have got rid of it.’ ‘Yes, Sire,’ replied Rosny gravely, ‘I met *it* passing down-stairs just now.—It was quite green.’ ‘*Ventre-saint-gris!*’ cried the King, ‘there is no blinding those sharp eyes of thine, Rosny.’”

Peals of laughter rewarded this anecdote, which was followed by many others of a similar nature; for, in private, the court-ladies were by no means particular in the style or substance of their conversation. Gertrude was surprised—but fortunately, from not comprehending a word of the improper allusions, the double entendre, and the concealed meanings of these

little historiettes, most of the wit fell pointless, as far as she was concerned. She observed that Preciosa, who sat half concealed by the ample hoop of the Queen-Mother, took no part in the conversation, and never laughed nor even smiled. She bent over her embroidery-frame, her black curls nearly shading her face; and once Gertrude saw a tear roll slowly down her cheek, and drop upon her work.

The bustle and confusion of the crowded streets afforded much more amusement to Gertrude, who had never before resided in a city, than the conversation of the select circle within. Few carriages had yet been seen in the gay city of Paris.

The coach of Queen Catherine de Medicis excited, upon its first appearance, as much wonder and speculation as if her Majesty had caused her palace to be put upon wheels for her daily airing. Her example was quickly followed by people of fashion; but still, a coach was considered as the exclusive privilege of aristocracy; and even the ladies of highest rank

preferred the usual method of riding on horse-back behind their grooms,—an exercise which we may believe to have been more conducive both to health and beauty than the present fashion.

The streets were crowded with horsewomen galloping in all directions, splendidly attired in long mantles of silk or velvet, high ruffs, and hats with waving plumes. A few litters also, followed by numerous out-riders, were borne slowly along, and added to the variety of the scene; while the numerous foot-passengers, the fantastic showmen or *jongleurs*, with their puppet-boxes, monkeys, and dancing-bears, beating upon drums, or tingling their guitars to attract attention, formed a scene at once novel and amusing to one who had lived in seclusion. Sometimes, the imposing cavalcade forming the retinue of a Cardinal would block up the way, while the citizens gazed with wondering eyes upon the splendid liveries of his Eminence's suite, closely followed by the English Ambassador, with his handsome horses and well-ap-

pointed retinue, or by some gorgeously-dressed, heavy-looking Spaniards, forming part of the establishment of his Most Catholic Majesty's Minister to the French Court. Sometimes, the air becoming suddenly perfumed with incense, announced the approach of the Host; and a long procession of priests, magnificently attired, came forward, chanting the sacramental hymn. At the approach of the veiled Host, the people fell upon their faces—the equestrians alighted from horseback, and knelt in the dust, while the eye of the priest glanced suspiciously at the Huguenot nobleman, who passed hastily through the crowd, muffled up in his cloak, and half raising his cap, with a sort of compromise between his fears and his conscience.

But steps were heard in the antechamber, and the King of Navarre entered, followed by the Duke of Guise, Monsieur de Rosny, and various other noblemen. Even the cold and vain Monsieur de Soissons, who was of the number, might have been gratified by the happy smile and deep blush with which Madame Catherine

greeted his approach. A thousand smiles welcomed the King of Navarre; but not the one he sought for.

“You are embroidering, Lady de Frontenaye,” said Madame de Sauves, “with as much industry and intentness, as if you were calculating how many deniers you might, by hard labour, obtain in the course of a week.”

Gertrude looked up and smiled, and her smile was so beautiful, that even the ladies, so slow in discovering each other's perfections, were stricken by it. “I have not heard you sing yet,” said Madame Catherine to Gertrude; “and, in truth, I cannot but believe that your voice is sweet, when your very eyes discourse music, as Monsieur Ronsard would say. You, who have lived in the land of Troubadours, must needs be well versed in their songs. I pray you, give us a *sirvente* from Pierre Vidal.”

Gertrude, thus called upon, could but obey. She took up a lute which hung in a recess, and placed herself in such a manner that an embroidered curtain concealed her features. Her

rich and mellow voice, blending in perfect harmony with the tones of the instrument, produced an enchanting effect. The air was a simple Provençal melody; the words, by Pierre Vidal, expressed all the tenderness of love, such as it is described in the wild and impassioned language of the Troubadours. When she had finished, there was silence. Every one had felt too deeply to be able to applaud. As she rose to lay down the lute, King Henry stood before her. His face was pale, and his usual gay smile had fled. The curtain concealed them both from the rest of the company.

“I can endure this agony no longer,” he said in a low tone, but with a vehemence which made Gertrude start. “I will kneel here till I have obtained forgiveness.”

“As you please, Sire,” said Gertrude in a trembling voice, and attempting to pass.

“When you have forgiven me, and promised to listen to an explanation,” said the King.

“Never!” said Gertrude more firmly; “there are insults which no words can explain away.”

“ I am answered,” said the King, in a tone of anger, rising from his knees; and with a haughty bow he held aside the curtain. Suddenly, a faint cry proceeded from amongst the ladies of honour who surrounded the Queen-Mother. Preciosa had fainted: she lay extended on the floor, like a beautiful marble statue, without motion or life. They bathed her pale forehead, and carried her to a couch near an open window. Some said that the music had overpowered her—some looked at the King of Navarre, and exchanged significant glances. She slowly opened her heavy eyes, and saw Gertrude bending over her, then closed them again, as if to shut out some terrifying vision. She recovered, at length, and began to talk and laugh with the utmost appearance of gaiety. An attentive observer might have perceived that her eyes were wild, and her manner hurried, and that the sudden colour on her cheek was more like the flush of fever than the glow of health.

It was proposed that the Royal party should adjourn to the French theatre, to be present at

the representation of a new comedy, entitled "*Les Esprits*," by Pierre de la Rivey. For the first day, the young Countess was pleased with every thing she saw. She was present when the King received the foreign ambassadors; drove through Paris with Madame Catherine; and attended the various toilets of her Royal Highness, without an idea that the presence of the King of Navarre caused her the least gratification, and wondering that the conversation which had, in the morning, appeared dull and uninteresting, should afterwards have become lively and animated. She believed that King Henry was irretrievably offended by her reply to him, and tried to persuade herself that the idea gave her much pleasure. For the first time in her life, she took pains with her toilette, dressed herself with scrupulous care, and was so dissatisfied with her *coëffure*, that the Duchess knocked at the door of her apartment, to inform her that the Royal party were ready to depart, before she had decided whether it was becoming or not.

"Ah!" said the Duchess, shaking her head,

“you would not have answered to-night had I inquired what your dress was to be.”

“I have not thought of it.”

“See what one day at court can do! Madame de Sauves herself could not have succeeded better in the affected negligence of the piquante simplicity which distinguishes your attire to-night; especially the head-dress.—Excuse me, my dear cousin, for saying so,” added the Duchess, as they descended the staircase, “but, by your dress this evening, I think you are in love. When one dresses to please no particular object, the style is totally different. There is the toilette which vanity induces us to make, merely for the effect of charming the multitude—such, for example, as this kirtle of black and gold, which I wear, and this embroidered *pourpoint* with diamond buttons, Madame la Rivière’s newest idea, and no doubt very handsome, yet wanting the finish, the inexpressible touch which we cannot give to our dress, unless the finger of Cupid directs us, when each ring even is put on

with a separate motive. Thank me, at least, for having caused that bright blush, especially if *he* is among our court circle."

King Henry and the Duke of Guise assisted the ladies into their carriages. The maids of honour followed in the train of Royalty. Madame Catherine and her governess, Madame de Fignonville, in the first carriage. Preciosa was wrapped up in a dark Spanish mantilla, and long black veil.

"You look, Señora," said one of the ladies, "like a Spanish nun escaped from her convent."

"A nun!" said Preciosa thoughtfully.

"Yes, Señora," said the young lady, with an air of surprise, "but methinks now you look as melancholy as if you had just taken the veil."

"Just taken the veil!" repeated Preciosa, as if unconscious that any one was present.

"I do not comprehend you, Señora," said the young lady rather angrily; "methinks you are studying the part of Echo."

"Comprehend me!" said Preciosa with a bitter smile.

“ Do you not agree with me, Lady de Frontenaye, that persons of different minds can as little comprehend one another as those who speak different languages? Fortunate in this world are those whom Dante describes as suffering in hell the punishments which his noble mind considered due to those common souls who had led lives neither virtuous nor wicked. Yet of such is the general mass of society composed.—‘ They are mingled with the despised crowd of angels who were not rebellious, who were not faithful to God, but who thought only of themselves. The heavens drove them away, that their beauty might not be sullied by them. The depths of hell would not receive them, that the condemned sinners might feel no pride in their companionship. In the world, their name is forgotten. Justice and Mercy alike disdain them. Let us not speak of them, said Virgil to Dante. Let us pass on.’ ”

The carriages stopped at the door of the theatre, and prevented an angry reply from the young lady who had first spoken, and who

had just penetration enough to discover that the Spanish lady was speaking of her in no very exalted terms. King Henry and the Duke of Guise, after having escorted the Princesses to their box, were waiting with several of the nobility to hand out the maids of honour. Gertrude alighted last, and the King of Navarre offered her his arm. She accepted it in silence. The royal party were late, and the theatre was crowded to suffocation. As they passed through the crowd, collected to view the approach of the equipages, shouts of "*Vive le Roi de Navarre ! Vive notre Henri !*" resounded on all sides. He returned their salutation with that cordial familiarity, that graceful kindness, which afterwards procured him the appellation of "*Le Roi du peuple.*"

"*Our Henry !*" repeated Gertrude to herself ; " the meanest subject of France may use that expression. May I not, without blame, feel towards him as they do ? " They entered last. The first act of the comedy was already over. The plot turned upon the contrivances

put in practice by a young lady and her lover, to prevent the old miser her father from discovering that the aforesaid gallant was concealed in his house:—the principal method being their inducing him to believe that it was taken possession of by phantoms. The Duchess pointed out to Gertrude the different persons of distinction who occupied the opposite boxes. She showed her Madame d'O——, wife of the Superintendent of Finance, who, as if to show the extent of her husband's wealth, was habited in cloth of gold, with a diamond stomacher, and wore upon her head a pyramid of jewels of immense value, heaped one upon another, without any regard to taste, and the weight of which obliged her to keep her head continually in the same posture:—Zamet, the rich Italian, who, at the marriage of one of his daughters, being requested by the notary to name his titles, replied, “Write that I am Seigneur Suzerain of seventeen hundred thousand crowns.” The beautiful Marie de Beauvilliers and Mademoiselle de Courtenaye sat directly opposite;

but no charms, however powerful at other times, could withdraw the King of Navarre's attention from Gertrude. Suddenly, a report of fire spread universal consternation through the theatre. In a moment, every box was emptied, and the passages crowded to a frightful excess. King Henry seized the arm of Gertrude on the first alarm, and drew her into the passage. Little respect was shown to rank or royalty. The screams of the women—the loud oaths and imprecations of the men—the cries of distress and alarm, and the frightful appearance of the fire, which was gradually spreading over the house, formed a dismal and terrifying scene.

“Where are the Princesses, the Duchess, and Preciosa?” exclaimed Gertrude.

“They are safe,” cried the King.

“Say that you pardon me now, Lady de Frontenaye, when the flames may devour us the next moment.”

“I do, I do,” said Gertrude hurriedly.

“Then,” cried the King, “I swear by my hopes of Heaven, that this moment of mortal

fear, in which I yet tremble for an angel's safety, is dearer to me than all the happiness of my past life."

It was not a time to reply. The crowd pressing eagerly towards the door-way interrupted all egress. The fire had reached the passages. A burning rafter fell amongst the crowd, amid shouts of despair and groans of agony.

"It is all over," said Gertrude, growing pale, and grasping convulsively the arm of the King. She was unable to support herself. He seized her in his arms, and pushed his way through the crowd with desperate strength. He reached the door-way in safety.

"Let me pass," cried a loud voice. "I am the Duke of Anjou."

"And if you were the King," said a voice from the crowd, "you must e'en wait your turn this night."

"I pray you, my good friends, let me pass," said King Henry earnestly to some of the bystanders. "This lady has fainted."

“Navarre ! Navarre !” cried the mob. “Make way for the King of Navarre;” and an immediate passage was opened.

“I thank you, my friends,” said he, taking off his cap. “I pray God there may have been few lives lost this night !”

The cold air blowing into the passages revived Gertrude a little from her insensibility. King Henry carried her into the open air, and threw his mantle over her to protect her from the cold.

“Gertrude !” exclaimed he, “you have said that you forgive me. Say that you are not totally indifferent to me, and my happiness will be completed. Say but one word to assure me of this, and I will live in the consciousness of having an interest in your heart.”

Gertrude half opened her eyes. “When you have saved my life, how shall I reproach you !” said she in a faint voice.

She was roused to a sense of her imprudence by the gratitude of the King, which he poured forth in energetic terms.

“What have I said?” exclaimed Gertrude. “To what have I exposed myself? If I have uttered some foolish words, Sire, impute them to agitation—to gratitude, and forget them.”

“Never!” said the King. “Pardon me for disobeying you; but I cannot forget——”

“You have saved my life,” said Gertrude. “Do not give me cause to regret that I have received a benefit so great at your hands. I esteem you, Sire, as a hero—as the chief of our religion. I forgive you, since I have said so, the insult which I received by your declaration of love at Frontenaye. If you think my friendship worth accepting, I offer it to you. Let not the husband of Marguerite de Valois forget the sacred ties which bind him!”

“Yet one word in explanation,” said the King—“one word as to my hopes for the future, when free to offer you a throne.”

“I have already said,” replied Gertrude, “that explanation is useless. The past cannot be recalled; but the memory of it may be obliterated. I blame the imprudence, on my

part, which has caused you again to forget the respect due even to the meanest female. As for the future, it is in the hand of Heaven; but the present is our own. And here I solemnly declare, that the repetition of a similar line of conduct will cause me to leave Paris, and to retire where I shall be free from persecution and insult."

Tears of wounded pride trembled in her eyes as she spoke. King Henry could not bear to see a woman weep.

"By all the blessed Saints!" cried he, "you wrong me. May misery be my portion, if I have ever deviated in thought, in word, or in deed, from the most devoted respect towards you. Methinks a holy light encircles you, rendering you too pure for the society of those with whom you live. Forgive me for having caused you a moment's uneasiness. The day may come when I shall be free to speak what till then shall never pass my lips. You have offered me your friendship—I accept it with gratitude."

They were now at the gate of the Louvre.

“ We are friends then,” said Gertrude.

“ For ever,” said the King, respectfully kissing her hand. Gertrude hastily passed the royal guard stationed at the gate, and flew upstairs. The royal party had just arrived ; and amidst the mutual congratulations upon their escape, the numerous ejaculations of wonder, and horror, and surprise, which proceeded from all quarters, Gertrude’s confusion escaped unnoticed. A splendid ball concluded the evening—but, pleading fatigue, she retired to her apartment.

CHAPTER II.

I will to rest, right weary of this revel,
The gayest we have had for many moons;
And yet, I know not why, it cheered me not.

BYRON.

GERTRUDE sat in her boudoir immersed in thought, her hair disencumbered of its rich ornaments, her eyes fixed upon vacancy. She revolved in her mind all the events of that evening,—she felt dissatisfied with her own conduct. When she reflected that she owed her existence to the King of Navarre,—that he had risked his own life to save hers,—she felt that her gratitude to him must have seemed cold and feeble and trifling, in comparison with the courageous devotion which he had displayed in his conduct

towards her. But again, when she recollected that he had taken advantage of her agitation to renew his insulting admiration, it seemed to her, that, far from showing sufficient severity, she had been weak in granting her forgiveness to what she ought ever to have regarded as unpardonable, and in parting on friendly terms with one who had so conducted himself towards her. For one moment—and it was but for a moment—a bright and dazzling vision flashed before her eyes, as she remembered his words, “When free to offer you a throne.” For one moment, she thought of queenly rank, and splendour, and power, shared with him ; of a life devoted to his happiness, and to that of his subjects ; but the calm reflection of a moment banished the treacherous hope. She recollected the cold policy which dictated all royal unions—the necessity of strengthening his influence by an alliance with some foreign power—the years which might elapse before his union with Marguerite de Valois could be dissolved—and the bright vision of an instant fled from her

thoughts.. At length, she lulled her mind to rest with the dangerous idea, that her involuntary attachment was blameless, so long as she concealed it in the deepest recesses of her heart; and she determined to guard, with the most scrupulous care, her future conduct towards King Henry; to avoid his presence, except in public, "until," said she mournfully to herself, "he shall have learnt to forget me, as he has done by many others. Yet, would to Heaven I had never seen him! Alas! those who would really avoid danger must fly from it."

The day fixed for the performance of the ballet approached, and not only the distinguished persons who were themselves to be the performers of it, but the numerous circle who had the honour of receiving invitations for that evening, were engaged in hurried preparation. The *couturières* of Paris found their heads and hands equally called into requisition; and, as splendour was the order of the day, heaven knows how many rich pieces of velvet and cloth of gold, and silver tissue, fell victims to

the sharp scissors of the unsparing milliners within the precincts of the Louvre. Long and mysterious conferences were held in the apartments of Madame Catherine, from which King Henry and the Duke of Guise were for the present excluded.

His Majesty King Henry III. had retired to Vincennes, with a select accompaniment of favourites both male and female; sometimes dancing till daybreak with a company of low Italian actresses, who enlivened his retreat; at others, dressing himself in a shift which had formerly decorated an image of the Virgin Mary at Loretto; and shutting himself up in his cabinet with relics, and bones of martyrs, and images of saints.

His absence from Paris appeared to produce little effect upon the gaiety of its inhabitants. At Court, every one seemed interested in the approaching fête, except the Señora Villabella, who wandered through the gay rooms, and looked at the splendid dresses, with a face and manner expressive of the most perfect indif-

ference to all that was passing around her. Gertrude frequently observed the eyes of Preciosa fixed upon her with an expression of the most profound pity. The Princess, who was still in raptures with the beauty of the young Countess, took a childish pleasure in decking her beautiful hair with flowers; and in every fresh *coëffure* thought her so lovely, that she could not bring herself to decide in which she was to appear as Proserpine.

As she sat one day twisting her fingers through the shining curls of her young favourite, the King of Navarre entered the room.

“Decide, Sire,” said the Princess, “flowers or diamonds for Proserpine—how shall her hair be dressed?”

“Twisted round,” said the King, “and confined with gold bodkins.”

“What an odd taste!” exclaimed the Princess. “What could induce your Majesty to imagine such a head-dress?”

Gertrude, still kneeling on a cushion before the Princess, looked down and blushed deeply.

Madame Catherine looked at her with a severe air. "Nay, if it is a mystery," said she, in a voice of suppressed anger, "I shall inquire no farther."

"What!" said Madame de Neufoy, anxious to avert a coming storm, "has your Highness then forgotten the beautiful Victorie d'Ayale, the young Greek girl, who dressed her hair after that fashion?"

"True," said the Princess, recovering her good-humour; "his Majesty having then a vitiated taste, we dismiss him from our council.—Go, Sire; I rejoice you have the grace to blush; and trust me, Lady de Frontenaye will not consult your taste in future."

"And you, Señora," said Madame Catherine, turning to Preciosa, "you, who are to figure as the Goddess of Beauty and the Queen of Love, have you prepared any thing suited to so transcendent a part? I hope you do not mean to appear with your veil and rosary; Venus in the garb of a nun would have a novel effect."

"Perhaps," said Madame de Sauves, "the

Señora intends to represent Venus rising from the sea. In that case, her drapery would be too scanty to require much trouble in arranging."

"*Fi donc, Madame !*" said Madame la Rivière, who was standing in the midst of the ladies, and displaying, in every possible light, the *jupon* of Madame Catherine, composed of silver tissue, and trimmed with bunches of golden corn, for her character of Ceres.

"Well, then," said Madame de Sauves, "perhaps, Señora, you will rise from the waves in a sea-green bathing-gown."

"*Mais oui,*" said the milliner, who had no idea of jesting on so important a subject ; "that might be arranged so as to have the most flattering effect."

"Thank you, ladies," said Preciosa, with a sad smile ; "but, to my Spanish fancy, methinks I would prefer that scarlet mantle lined with minivair, as better suited to this cold weather."

"Ay, Señora," said the Princess ; "but that is designed to keep his infernal Majesty warm

when he leaves his own dominions in search of Proserpine : it is for my brother of Navarre. —But you need not throw it off so hurriedly,” said Madame Catherine, laughing, “it will not contaminate you.”

The important evening at length arrived. The palace was one blaze of light. The state-rooms of the Louvre were already crowded to suffocation with ladies in hoops, and ruffs, and fardingales, and jewels and feathers—and gentlemen with gay embroidered doublets, and rich velvet mantles, and ruffs and cuffs of point-lace, and long swords and high-plumed caps. Those were the happy days, when no gentleman could be mistaken for his valet, however rich the accoutrements of the latter ; when no waiting-maid was better dressed than her mistress ; when a gentleman’s toilet was an affair requiring fully as much consideration as, and rather more expense than, that of a lady ; when jewels and lace, seed-pearls, and gold embroidery, adorned their attire ; and when their rivalry in magnificence of dress was carried to so great

a height, that many young men of rank were reduced to the necessity of cutting down their wood, and selling their patrimonial property, in order to shine with suitable splendour at a ball or a ballet, a masque or a pageant—thus carrying, as the King of Navarre expressed it, “their castles and forests upon their backs.”

Alas! could the noblesse of that period have seen, in the glass of futurity, the black short-tailed coats, and sad-coloured pantaloons, and white neckcloths and gills, and striped waistcoats of their descendants, how would they have thanked Heaven that they enjoyed life before these degenerate days!—One of the rooms was formed into a temporary stage or platform, and every one awaited the entrance of the Gods and Goddesses with impatient expectation. A thick green screen concealed the theatre from the inquisitive eyes of the audience. At the shrill blast of a trumpet, the partition was drawn away, and a murmur of admiration and delight filled the room. The stage represented a parterre, and, to the sound of the soft music of clarions and

hautboys, Proserpine advanced with timid but graceful movement. Gertrude was habited in snow-white drapery, her auburn hair hanging down to its full length, her only ornament a splendid diamond star, which blazed on her forehead. The Graces danced in the background, but appeared as inferior to her as did Calypso's nymphs in the presence of that goddess. Madame Catherine made a brilliant appearance as Ceres ; and, in truth, as none but the handsomest women of the day were admitted to dance in these ballets, the general effect was strikingly beautiful.

“ *Foi de gentilhomme !*” said King Henry to D'Aubigné,—“ notwithstanding the many hard engagements wherein I have fought, I have never met with so dangerous and alarming a squadron as the present.”

“ They have taken you captive pretty often, Sire !” said D'Aubigné ; “ but, fortunately, these fair enemies are fond of a frequent exchange of prisoners.”

The arrival of Pluto, with the nefarious in-

tention of carrying off the nymph, was announced by a strain of dismal music. The handsome representative of "gloomy Dis" made his appearance, attended by his demoniacal retinue, and Proserpine was borne away to the side-scenes, amidst the lamentations of Ceres, and the tears of the Graces.

"Would to Heaven," said King Henry, as Gertrude and he entered the antechamber set apart as a tiring-room for that evening, "that some part of this fiction were reality ! For one evening, Lady de Frontenaye, you are my Queen."

"The Queen of the Infernal Regions," said Gertrude smiling.

"Hell would be Paradise in my eyes, under such circumstances," exclaimed King Henry, looking at Gertrude with wondering admiration. Her beautiful colour, heightened by dancing ; her bright and expressive eyes, sparkling with more than usual lustre ; her long sunny hair, hanging towards the ground in waving curls, rendered her a lovely representation of something

more than mortal. Yet the expression of melancholy, which early misfortune had stamped upon her features, was never more visible; for love, if not happy, is assuredly the saddest of feelings.

“ Early in years, and yet more infantine
In figure, she had something of sublime
In eyes which sadly shone as seraph’s shrine.
All youth, but with an aspect beyond time,
Radiant and grave, as pitying man’s decline—
Mournful, but mournful of another’s crime,
She looked as if she sat by Eden’s door,
And grieved for those who could return no more.”

“ Did you but know,” said the King, after a pause, “ the extent of my domestic unhappiness, and how I envy the internal comfort of the meanest peasant’s cottage, where, after a hard day’s labour, he receives a smiling reception from his wife and family,—you would grant me your pity.”

“ I do,” said Gertrude gravely, “ if the evil be without remedy.”

“ Assuredly,” said Henry, “ my conduct has not been faultless; but what can be expected

from unions founded on cold and selfish policy ! At the age of ten, my marriage with Catherine de Medicis was fixed. Such are the trammels of kings. Nay, do not look so coldly, Lady de Frontenaye ; remember, I have the promise of your friendship—and, in the court circle, what opportunity have I of availing myself of it ?”

“ You have my friendship, Sire, and good wishes,” said Gertrude ; “ but of what avail would counsel given by one so inexperienced as I am be to your Majesty ? Let us go : the Gods and Goddesses will be assembled upon Olympus by this time ; and although we do not form part of that pageant, we must not lose the spectacle.”

“ Thus it is,” said Henry mournfully, “ that you abridge the few short moments of happiness which fate has granted me ; and while you smile upon others, to me alone you are unkind and severe.”

Gertrude turned her large soft eyes upon King Henry, and their expression might have

convinced him how unfounded was the accusation.

The Duchess of Montbazon, fantastically but tastefully attired as Iris, with a bright blue robe, and a resplendent rainbow upon her head, entered precipitately, exclaiming, "If you would see no mimic representation of Venus, but the Goddess of Beauty herself, come and look at Preciosa, I beseech you."

She hurried to the front of the stage. The second part of the ballet was commencing; and she was so struck with the appearance of Preciosa, that she stood transfixed with surprise. She stood surrounded by graces and loves, (among whom little Edward made a conspicuous figure,) arrayed in a drapery of purple and gold and crimson, which seemed to float round her like clouds of varying hues,—with a cestus of precious stones, and a jewelled crown representing stars. Unlike her usual paleness, she had a brilliant colour; and, as if animated by an unwonted desire to please, she danced with a spirit and buoyancy which astonished all accus-

tomed to her usual languid and melancholy demeanour. Her small sandalled feet seemed as though they disdained to touch the earth. Her success was the more complete, because unexpected ; and her dress produced a double effect, from her usual carelessness with regard to her toilette.

“How superb she is !” said Gertrude to the King of Navarre.

“Yes,” said he with a half-suppressed sigh, “she is like the Preciosa of former days.”

“And what has changed her, Sire ?” said Gertrude. “Is she not happy ?”

“In truth, I know not,” said Henry, who looked at Preciosa as if spell-bound. “I believe her temper to be capricious, her ideas wild and tristful ; but, on the contrary, she appears at times to possess an exuberance of spirits.”

“She is beautiful !” said Gertrude with enthusiasm.

“She has the beauty of a goddess !” replied the King ; “yet, believe me, it is refreshing to the eye to turn from her, magnificent as she is, and to rest on your simple drapery and angel-form.”

The ballet was at length concluded, and the royal performers mingled with the rest of the company, complimenting each other upon their dress and dancing. The handsome Duke of Guise, in his character of Apollo; Madame de Sauves, who had looked the youthful cup-bearer to perfection; the gentle and beautiful Queen Louisa, who represented Juno; Madame de Grammont, as Diana, habited as a huntress, with a pale silver crescent on her forehead; all received a tribute of admiration. But, amidst the gay groups, Preciosa was no longer to be seen, and the company concluded, that, fatigued with her unusual exertions, she had retired to rest.

The first sickly dawn of morning was already spreading its faint light over the city, before the party broke up; and Gertrude retired to her chamber, comparing, in her own mind, her quiet life at Frontenaye with this changing of night into day. A gentle knock at the door interrupted her reflections, and Preciosa, opening it softly, stood before her. Her face was

so deadly pale, and her whole aspect so different from what it had been when Gertrude last saw her, that she gazed upon her with an indefinable emotion of terror. She had taken off her splendid garments and jewels, and wore her usual dress—her veil and mantilla.

“Pardon me for intruding upon you at this hour,” said she, “but I come, Lady de Frontenaye, to take leave of you before my departure.”

“Your departure, Señora !” cried Gertrude.

“Yes,” said Preciosa, “the time has arrived ; the Queen-Mother has received my resignation. In a few hours, I shall bid adieu to Paris, and to all for which I have clung to life. In a few days, I shall have taken leave of the world, and in the gloom of a convent shall conceal for ever my sorrows and my crimes.”

“Good Heavens !” said Gertrude : “what revulsion of feeling has caused this sudden resolution ?”

“It is not sudden,” said Preciosa : “but it required a painful struggle—It is past.”

“And why must it be so?” said Gertrude.
“And why must you,—so young, so beautiful, so beloved, — immolate yourself voluntarily, and leave a world where your destiny appears so brilliant and happy?”

“Happy!” said Preciosa. “Can the feelings of the heart be read upon the features?”

“In truth,” said Gertrude, “I can hardly think, Señora, that you are the same person whom I saw so short a time since; your eyes are heavy, and your bright colour has fled.”

“Paint will wash off,” said Preciosa with a faint smile. “But I have no time to lose. Hear me, Lady de Frontenaye. I have watched you from the moment of your entrance here, with an interest which has daily and hourly increased. Young, and lovely, and innocent, without a guide to direct your steps, I grieve for the perils which encircle your path; and, though bestrewed with flowers, believe me, it is not the less dangerous. I have made a resolution, and will keep it. To you I will reveal what I never before have breathed to mortal ear—the

history of my sins and sufferings ; and should it prove useful to you, I will thank heaven for having granted me the power of performing one good deed before I close my eyes upon the world, and its delusions, and its deceitful pleasures. — Gertrude, have you courage to hear me ? My words shall be true as the dying confession of one who has but a few hours to live.”

“ Why make a painful confession ? ” said Gertrude trembling. “ And against what would you warn me ? ”

“ Ask your heart,” said Preciosa.—Gertrude blushed.—“ When I shall have related my history to you,” said Preciosa, “ I shall have lost your esteem—I shall be in your eyes a degraded and fallen creature. But it matters not ; it is but the completion of the sacrifice. Embrace me, Gertrude, now—and for the last time :—in a short while you will shrink from my presence.”

“ Never,” said Gertrude “ Whatever your sins may be, I feel assured that they cannot

surpass your misfortunes and your repentance. Tell me your story, Señora, and do not doubt my sympathy with your sorrows. Tell me every particular of your history, I beseech you. I cannot sleep, and no one will be stirring in this palace for many hours." They sat down together; and Preciosa, with a pale cheek, but firm voice, spoke as follows.

CHAPTER III.

PRECIOSA'S STORY.

Her mother was a Moorish maid from Fez,
Where all is Eden, or a wilderness.

There the large olive rains its amber store
In marble founts ; there grain, and flower, and fruit,
Gush from the earth until the land runs o'er ;
But there, too, many a poison-tree has root,
And midnight listens to the lion's roar,
And long, long deserts scorch the camel's foot,
Or, heaving, whelm the helpless caravan :
And as the soil is, so the heart of man.

BYRON.

“ THE Marquis Geraldini, a young Spanish nobleman of ancient family and high birth, left his own country with the intention of travelling through the empire of Morocco, from

a desire of learning something of the manners and customs of the Moors. Delighted with the pastoral life of the *Brebis*, or Mountaineers, who live in tents pitched under the shade of the wild palm-trees, and by the side of the cool rivulets, he joined a party of these wandering tribes, and soon acquired their respect and good-will by the courage and dexterity he displayed in the tiger and lion-hunts which form their principal amusement. Eben-Hassan, the Governor of a Moorish province, having received complaints of the conduct of one of his lieutenants, who had the charge of the encampment, or *douhar*, where the Marquis resided, announced his intention of coming to inquire in person into the cause of these grievances. A splendid tent was prepared for his reception; and the Moors assembled in crowds to witness his arrival. Their wonder was excited by the magnificence of his retinue, the number of his richly-laden mules and camels, and the splendid dresses of his running servants. Eben-Hassan himself rode through the tents,

upon a mule sumptuously caparisoned, and by his side rode a young lady closely veiled, but whose figure appeared elegant and dignified. It was the beautiful Zulema, his only child. One of the fierce dogs which guard the entrance of the Moorish tents, sprang out upon their approach, and, the mule of Zulema becoming restive, she was thrown from her seat, and her veil fell off,—but she received no injury. The Marquis, who had flown to her assistance, was so struck with her singular beauty, as to be unable for some moments to pay any attention to the haughty thanks of the old Governor, who, after giving him a dry and formal invitation to his tent, sternly commanded Zulema's attendants to replace their mistress's veil, and passed on. The Marquis's character was cold and haughty, and he could not but be sensible from the manner of Eben-Hassan, that his presence would be considered rather as an intrusion than otherwise; but he remembered the soft glance of the Moorish lady's dark eye, and his pride was conquered by the recollection. When

he paid his visit the next day, he was shown into the apartment where Zulema sat, surrounded by her women. She was seated upon a pile of velvet cushions, and singing to her mandoline one of those slow, melancholy airs with which that country abounds. Her dress was an under garment of white silk, embroidered richly in gold; her castan was of purple velvet, with a golden girdle; her head-dress, the long embroidered veil worn by the ladies of rank, fastened on by a diadem of pearls. Little yellow slippers, and jewelled bracelets, completed her costume. The Marquis soon found that he had been admitted to this private apartment through the negligence of a Spanish servant—for the Moorish ladies receive no male visitors. The confusion of Zulema, as she cast down her long dark eyelashes tinged with henna, and hurriedly attempted to draw her veil over her features, increased her beauty. With a thousand apologies, the Marquis was about to retire, when the Governor entered the room. With ill-dissembled rage, he endeavoured to

give a courteous reception to his guest; and, casting a stern glance at Zulema, requested the Marquis to follow him to another part of the tent.

“ This interview was never forgotten by Geraldini; and sleeping or waking, the dark-eyed Zulema formed the subject of his meditations. It was with feelings of grief and indignation, that he shortly afterwards learned that she was destined to enter the harem of the tyrannical Emperor who, at that time, reigned in Morocco; and that her prayers and entreaties had hitherto proved unavailing to move her brutal father from his purpose. With the generous rashness of youth, the Marquis formed the resolution of risking his life to save her from so unworthy a destiny.

“ It was on the soft and balmy evening of a sultry day, that a litter, containing the beautiful Zulema, and escorted by a numerous suite of domestics, entered the Emperor's out-gardens, situated about five miles from Morocco, and passed into the large olive plantations watered

by the streams that descend from Mount Atlas. Every thing seemed still and tranquil, as the cavalcade wound slowly through this beautiful valley, formed by a chain of rocky mountains. The Gothic gates of the ancient palace were visible in the distance ; and the heart of Zulema died within her, as the strains of gay music, proceeding from the pavilions, reached her ear. Suddenly, the sounds of fierce conflict, and the clash of arms, caused her to start from her sad reverie. Her litter was thrown to the ground with violence. She undrew the curtains hastily, and looked out. A party of the ferocious *Brebis* had attacked her escort ; fierce blows were dealt on both sides ; and streams of human blood polluted the clear waters of the fountain which played near. As Zulema gazed with terror on the frightful struggle, she was seized by the Moorish chief, and placed upon a fleet Barbary horse, which one of the *Brebis* had held by the bridle during the engagement. The chief sprang up behind her, and in a few minutes the palace, the gardens, the olive-trees and foun-

tains, were left far behind, and the swift courser was toiling up a lonely and steep mountain-pass. The chief, enveloped in a coarse haïque and hood, at length checked the pace of the fiery animal, and, throwing off his mountain disguise, discovered to Zulema, (who, faint and breathless, dreaded to ask a question from one whom she believed to be a mercenary ruffian,) the features of the young and noble Marquis Geraldini. The gratitude of Zulema to her deliverer was unbounded; and, not to weary you with useless details, they escaped pursuit, by concealing themselves in caves by day, and continuing their journey by night, until they reached the coast in safety, and embarked for Europe.

“On their arrival at Madrid, the Marquis received the hand of Zulema, and withdrew with his bride to a charming summer-lodge, which he possessed on the banks of the Tagus, about twenty miles south of Madrid, and in the neighbourhood of the delightful palace of the Aranjuez.

“The country-seat of my father overlooked the gardens of *Los Deleites*, where the noble

avenues of lofty trees, the sudden transitions to lawns and wilderness, the cascades of water breaking through the thickets, the tuneful songs of the numberless birds sheltered in these cool recesses,—all unite to render it a place of continual enchantment. In this retreat I was born; and the Marquis Geraldini, whose father had filled a high situation at Court, some time after presented his Moorish bride at the palace of Philip the Second. Even that gloomy tyrant was struck with her personal charms; and when the ceremony of baptism was to be administered to me, sent notice of his intention to act as sponsor on that occasion. Suitable preparations were made for his reception; and, dressed in the finest lace, with a diamond cross, which my mother herself had tied round my neck, I was carried down to the distinguished company, and received the name of Leonisa. In the evening, the Geraldini family were invited to a splendid fête, which was to be given at the Aranjuez, and I was left to the care of my nurse, a simple Moorish woman, whom Zulema,

with a natural fondness for her country, had preferred to a native of Spain.

“Fertile as is the general aspect of the country round Aranjuez, it is surrounded by steep and rocky hills, presenting a wild and desolate appearance. Philip, in order to extend his chace, had ordered all the vines which formerly grew there to be rooted up, by which means he drove away the inhabitants, and rendered the environs of his villa a perfect desert, whose lonely solitudes were occasionally peopled by hordes of banditti, or by the wandering Gitanillas, who come there during the residence of the Court at Aranjuez, in hopes of plunder. One of these vagrants, who had of course watched for a safe opportunity to effect her purpose, presented herself to my nurse, Almana; and, having engaged her attention by the prediction of a splendid fortune, begged her to follow her into the garden, where she would cull her some flowers possessing wonderful properties. Almana, leaving me upon a couch, followed the Bohemian; and several of the concealed gang springing

over the wall of Los Deleites, I was carried off to their cave in the mountains.

“The first recollection which I retain connected with my wandering life, is that of living in a deep cave, or rather hole, about twelve feet in depth, (the tents being abandoned on account of the snow,) on the side of one of the Carpathian mountains. Our horde consisted of the chief, or *Waywode*, as he was called, a stern old man, whose authority over the others was unbounded,—his daughter, a gentle dark-eyed woman, who treated me with much kindness, and her children of all ages, from the infant, whom she slung at her back, to her eldest boy, a wild, wayward urchin, about ten years of age;—the sister of the waywode, a fierce, desperate-looking woman, who had carried me off from my father’s house;—and his son-in-law, who was generally absent upon expeditions of plunder.

“Our principal amusement was crawling about in the day-time on the outside of the cave, or searching for chestnuts in the woods, until we learned to climb up the highest

trees with the agility of squirrels,—or starting the wild chamois as he lay basking in the sun on the top of a jutting precipice—and shouting with childish glee, as he gracefully leaped from crag to crag. Sometimes, a herd of wild buffaloes would rush down the mountains, or the distant cry of the hungry lynx would frighten us back into our cave. Never shall I forget my wonder and admiration, when a party of heydukes, escorted by several splendidly-dressed hussars, were seen winding up the mountain-path, with their high fur caps, and short mantles, and broad-swords, and battle-axes. Some of them stopped and spoke to us; and one of the hussars, calling me a beautiful child, lifted me upon his horse, and bade me tell him his fortune. Imitating with my childish voice the jargon which I had heard used on similar occasions, I told him that he loved a beautiful lady on the other side of the mountains in Poland,—but to ride fast, for there was a cavalier with her, with dark eyes and black whiskers, who would carry her off, if he

was not in time. I remember, the officer's cheek grew pale; and one of his companions laughed, and said: 'A good random stroke, Fernandez—the child must be a witch!' and the hussar put me gently off his horse, and threw some gold coins amongst us, for which the rest of the children scrambled, but I stood looking after the soldiers, till the waving feathers of the last heyduke had disappeared. I was then seven years of age; and as different from the rest of the gipsy-children, as though I could have had ideas impressed upon my mind, before I was carried away from my parents. Happy, careless, and indolent, they lay basking in the sun, without a thought of the future, or a care upon earth, except perhaps when the snow was too deep for them to venture into the woods in search of chestnuts. *I* always felt myself superior to these children; and at length they learnt to look up to me with a sort of respect, and a kind of tacit acknowledgment of being my inferiors. Even the headstrong Lucan regarded my slightest will

as his law. Singing was the amusement in which I principally delighted ; and as the daughter of the chief had a wild and beautiful voice, I learnt the airs that I heard her sing, and taught myself to play them on an old mandoline, which formed part of their heterogeneous furniture.

“ The name which these people gave me was Preciosa ; and notwithstanding the hardships which I endured, sometimes suffering the extremes both of cold and of hunger, and sometimes of severe treatment from the old man Polgar and his sister, I cannot say that my early years were unhappy. Spring came at last—and again we began to pitch our tents in solitary places, by the banks of a river, or in the bosom of a shady forest.

“ Our subsistence was precarious and uncertain. Sometimes, our repasts consisted of boiled poultry and early vegetables, and rare fruit plundered by moonlight from the gardens of the Hungarian noblemen ; at other times, we were obliged to be contented with a little water and a handful of wild berries. The superstition of

the peasantry who crowded round our tents, to have a look into futurity, formed our principal source of profit; nor was that feeling confined to the lower classes. Sometimes, a young and high-born Hungarian lady, closely muffled up in cloak and hood, would present herself at the entry of our habitation, when daylight had scarce begun to dawn, and, startling at the slightest sound, would hold out her white and jewelled hand, with beating heart and changing colour, while Zitana, the chief's daughter, foretold her a brilliant fortune, and happiness in love, and success over all her rivals; and truly the broad piece of gold which these credulous maidens would lay on the palm of Zitana's brown hand, ensured a favourable answer to all their queries.

“I was too young to distinguish right from wrong; and rejoiced with the others, when they recounted their success in robbing a poultry-yard, or in plundering an orchard, or when, carrying their daring yet farther, they would venture into the deserted chateau of an absent

nobleman, and return with a silver drinking-cup, or some of my lady's splendid velvet gowns, with which they would attire themselves in the most fantastic and incongruous manner. At length, they found that my talents in playing and singing to the mandoline might be turned to their advantage; and I used to sit at the outside of the tent, on the fine spring evenings, singing ballads, until I had collected a numerous audience. I was also taught to make straw-baskets, and sent, upon a donkey, to sell them at the neighbouring village. As I was naturally a thoughtful child, I at length began to perceive that we were a lonely and despised race, living in a very different manner from the cheerful and industrious inhabitants of the hamlets where my work was bought; and that the well-dressed children, who would look with wondering eyes at the basket-girl, shrank back with fearful curiosity, as their attendants explained to them that I was one of the gipsey-tribe; and I never forgot that, one day, a splendidly-dressed and beautiful lady on horseback stop-

ped to speak to me, and, turning to her companion, exclaimed, ‘What a pity that any thing so perfectly lovely should belong to such a race of miscreants!’ I pondered on this expression all the way home; and, while the rest of the children were sleeping, I lay in a tent sobbing bitterly, without exactly comprehending myself the cause of my grief.

“Nothing remarkable, however, occurred in my wandering life, until I had completed my tenth year, when, after traversing many different countries, we found ourselves spreading our tents under the bright blue skies of Italy. Here nature was so lavish, that it was seldom my companions had recourse to their former habits of plundering. Yet, even amidst the orange-groves, the vineyards, and the balmy atmosphere of that cloudless land, I daily became more unhappy and more thoughtful. The gipsies began to grow proud of the admiration which my childish beauty and talents excited; they treated me with much kindness, and distinguished me from the other children. My large

hat was formed of finer straw than theirs ; and Zitana had great pleasure in arranging my long black curls, and in dressing me as well as her means would afford. Curiosity, or the hopes of making money, attracted them to Venice during the Carnival ; and first, our tent was carried to the Canale Maggiore, where the gondoliers tried races for prizes ; and then we removed to St. Mark's Square, the principal rendezvous for all the shows and follies of the city. The whole world, in masques and fancy-dresses, traversed the streets in all directions ; but though showers of zecchinos were bestowed upon me, and I became an object of the curiosity and admiration of multitudes of busy idlers of all ranks and ages, still I was not contented ; and, young as I was, would gladly have fled from the haunts of men, and returned to our cave in the Carpathian mountains.

“ One night, when my companions were all asleep, I stole out from the tent, and, gazing with admiring awe on the starry and glorious heavens, I tried to analyze my own feelings of melan-

choly repining. The gondolas yet floated by in numbers ; and sounds of soft music proceeded from the palaces, while gay groups of ladies and cavaliers stood at the balconies. I could even distinguish their voices discoursing in that delicious language which sounded as sweet as the music itself. The perfume of a thousand flowers was wafted past me on the balmy air ; and, without knowing why, I burst into a flood of tears. At length, the lights were extinguished one by one, though now and then a black gondola floated silently by under the cover of night ; and a guitar was heard below the window of some fair Italian signora. Every thing around was so still, that I started with superstitious fear, when a low voice close by me suddenly whispered, ‘ Preciosa ! ’ — and turning round, I saw the eldest son of Zitana, who had always treated me with the utmost kindness.

“ ‘ You frightened me, Lucan,’ said I.

“ ‘ Hush ! ’ said he, putting his finger to his lips, and pointing towards the tent ; ‘ they may

waken soon, though I put poppy-seed among the macaroni they ate this evening.'

" 'Why, Lucan ?' said I.

" 'Because,' answered the boy, 'I have a secret to tell you, Preciosa ;—you are not Zitana's child !'—I clapped my hands in ecstasy, and almost felt assured, before I heard more, that I was the daughter of a noble house. 'And you are not my sister,' added he suddenly. 'But if it is to be done,' said he vehemently to himself, 'there is no time to lose. You are the daughter of a great and rich man,—a Spanish nobleman, called the Marquis Geraldini.—One night, when they thought I was asleep,—it was a year ago, when we journeyed through Poland,—I overheard our mother Zitana speak of it to the Waywode. It was his sister who carried you off. Your father lived near the palace of the Aranjuez, in Spain ; and, Preciosa, the beautiful lady near the ridotto, who spoke to you, and put her fingers through your curls—the lady with the large, beautiful, black eyes—she was your mother !'

“ ‘ *My mother !* ’ cried I : ‘ that lady with the bright diamonds, and rings upon all her fingers, and jewels round her waist ! Dear Lucan, it cannot be ! ’

“ ‘ I tell you, Preciosa, it is true as that you live and breathe at this moment.—And now, what will you do ? ’

“ ‘ Go to her, ’ said I eagerly.

“ ‘ But if Polgar know of it, and prevent you ? ’ said the boy.

“ ‘ You will help me, Lucan. ’

“ ‘ But I know also, ’ said Lucan, ‘ that she left Venice the day after, and has embarked for Spain.—However, Preciosa, I *will* help you,—though, when you are gone, I shall have no companion. ’

“ ‘ Come with me, ’ said I, ‘ and Zitana, and the chief ; and if my parents are rich, they will support them. ’

“ ‘ Go to—you are a child, ’ said the boy. ‘ The Bohemian must not approach openly the palaces of the civilized race ; yet will I assist your escape, for I know you are not happy. I

have watched you weeping, when you thought no one saw you. — But I hear some one stirring. Let us creep back into our tent.'

From that time, this generous boy employed himself in forming plans for effecting my restoration to my parents. — But do I not weary you, Gertrude ?"

"On the contrary," replied Gertrude, "I am deeply interested — I pray you, continue your strange narrative, and omit no particulars." Preciosa looked at her watch, and sighed. Gertrude took her hand with kindness, and she continued her story.

CHAPTER IV.

Her very smile was haughty, though so sweet,
Her very nod was not an inclination ;
There was a self-will even in her small feet,
As though they were quite conscious of their station.

BYRON.

“ WERE I indeed to omit no particulars of my eventful life,” said Preciosa, “ my story would form a volume. I would that I could bring before your eyes, even as they now flit before my own, the magnificent and solitary scenes with which my childhood was familiar ; the mountainous and desert tracts which we traversed, upon which, perhaps, no human foot had ever trod before ; the tempests and wild storms upon which we gazed with fearless admiration ; the splendid spectacles of sunrise which we

so often witnessed; the glorious starry nights when we lived on the banks of the Danube; or the soft Italian evenings, when the *contadinas* collected around us, as I danced to the mandoline in front of our tent.

“ The gipsies were all predestinarians; and this doctrine, to which I gave immediate belief, inspired us with a fearless carelessness of life, which those who live in society would hardly credit. The Venetians, who during this season only existed for amusement, invited me into their palaces to dance and sing, and tell fortunes, for the diversion of the company; and, as my mind gradually opened, I saw, more than ever, what a low and despised rank we held in the scale of human beings. Since the discovery of my true rank, my heart used to swell with indignation, and my cheeks burn with shame, when the little high-born Italian children, decked out in lace and trinkets, were brought in to see the little Bohemian girl, and rewarded me for my dancing with a handful of *deniers*.

“ It was with uncontrollable emotions of joy that I heard an order given for our departure into Spain. Once in the country of my parents, I foresaw the most perfect facility in my union with them. But I must hurry over that part of my history, or I should detain you too long with an account of our difficult and adventurous journey—our hair-breadth escapes in crossing the Alps,—and the magnificent and sublime scenery of these awful solitudes, where man would feel himself shrunk to nothing, but that he is lifted far above the grovelling and contracted ideas of time and space. Methinks, one glance from the summit of the Jura is a lesson to the human mind, worth all the homilies that ever proceeded from human eloquence !

“ At length, we reached the mountains which encircle the valley where the Aranjuez is situated ; and, when Lucan pointed out the situation of its far-famed gardens, and told me that the country-seat of the Geraldinis lay in that direction, I fell upon my knees, and thanked Heaven with rapturous gratitude.

“ It was a dark and gloomy night, and our own fire was the only light that shone as far as the eye could reach. I was standing at the door of the tent, trying to penetrate the darkness, and still gazing towards the valley that stretched out beneath us, when Polgar called me into the tent — and, conscious that my thoughts were bent upon making my escape, I tremblingly obeyed his summons. Zitana was weeping in a corner, and the children were all asleep, save Lucan, who stood beside his mother, with a grave but yet determined air. The old woman sat plaiting straw, with her usual face of unmoved indifference; but there was something in the eye of the chief that showed me he was agitated to no common degree; but whether with fear or anger I knew not.

“ ‘ Sit down, Preciosa,’ said he, ‘ and hear me.’ — I obeyed in silence. — ‘ Preciosa !’ said the old man, taking me by the hand, ‘ you are very young, but you have been the pride and ornament of our band; and though not the

daughter of Zitana, she loves you more than her own children, and weeps to think she will soon see you no more.'—I could not answer, but sat with throbbing heart, while he continued—' And did you think, simple children, to hide your design from me — and that I, who can read the stars even as those of the world peruse the handwriting of their fellow-men, could have been deceived by aught so inexperienced as you? Had I power, as I have wisdom, I might not part with you thus; but I have read your destiny for years, and the time has come—the day hath arrived. The planet that rules your natal hour is in the ascendant, and riches and power await you, — and happiness for a season; but the time will come, ay, and is not far distant, when you will regret your wandering life, and wish you had remained for ever in our tents. But you have not the power—fate wills it otherwise. It is now twelve years since we carried you off from your parents, for the sake of the diamonds with which you were decked; but think not that I repent me

of the action. Had you lived in the palaces of Madrid, wherein would you have been distinguished at this moment from the grovelling race who constitute civilized society? Would your mind have been opened by scenes of wonder and beauty, such as *they* cannot even picture to their fancy? Would your body have been inured to hardships, such as the children of luxury would shrink even to contemplate? Would your beauty have been so great—or would not rather the glance of that eagle eye have been tamed by the soft and luxuriant scenes which it would daily have witnessed? Could your voice have been more beautiful if cultivated—or would not those wild notes, which have wakened the echoes of the mountain-regions, have died away like the soft strains of an imprisoned bird? And who upon the earth is equal unto us? free and uncontrolled in our actions—submitting to no human power?—The king upon his throne? The royal slave, couched upon down, to whom the

wonders of the universe are as a sealed book? He who is encircled by the trammels of law, and custom, and prejudice? We are the lords of the mountains, of the forests, of the rivers, and of the plains. The storms of heaven are our zephyrs—the rain our bath—the thunder our music—the lightning our flambeaux: and can those who dwell in cities boast of aught so sublime? Freed from the sordid cares which oppress and weigh down the spirits of the rest of mankind, we are enabled to penetrate the veil which conceals futurity from their dull apprehensions. Do not then count it a loss that you have been withdrawn, for a while, from the common pursuits and low cares of the world. And for us, are we not sufficiently punished that you think of leaving us without a sigh, but rather with emotions of joy, such as you never before felt?’

“ ‘Oh! not without a sigh, my father,’ cried I. ‘Say not without a sigh. Can I ever forget your and Zitana’s kindness, and that of Lucan?’

But, my real father — my mother — shall I not rejoice to see them ?

“ ‘Ay, truly,’ said the old man ; ‘but does not that proud Spanish blood of thine glow with lofty aspirations after the rank, and the riches, and the dignities that await thee ? And dost thou not rejoice in leaving the wandering race and their humble tent, for the marble palaces and gilded roofs of the nobles of the land ? But be it so : it is thy nature ; and who shall change it ? To-morrow morning, Preciosa, by daybreak, Lucan shall guide thee on thy way ; and these eyes, which age has now begun to dim, shall see thee no more.’ ”

“ At these words, I burst into tears, and, had I been leaving the home of my parents, I could not have wept more bitterly. Yet not for a moment did my resolution of seeking my true home abandon me. When morning dawned, I started from a short and troubled slumber, and found all the gipsies already prepared for leaving their encampment. ‘At least,’ said Zi-

tana, 'we shall not remain within sight of the Aranjuez.'

"Polgar laid his hand upon my head, and prayed that the God of his fathers might bless my steps through life. The gentle Zitana could but weep, and fastened round my neck an amulet, which she believed to be a preventive against misfortune. The children gathered round me with looks of wonder and sorrow: even the old woman shook me kindly by the hand, and prayed me to forgive her harsh treatment. The expression of Lucan I shall never forget—the wild grief that shone in his eyes,—yet the manly and settled determination of his manner.

"At length I departed upon my journey. I carried my mandoline with me; and often, as we descended into the valley, I turned to take a last look of the gipsy-tent, and hardly knew whether my feelings partook most of happiness or of sorrow. Lucan walked beside me in silence, determined to struggle with the grief that oppressed him. We came to a road lead-

ing through a cultivated and fertile tract of country, unlike the barren regions we had left. Here Lucan stopped, and on his pointing through a vista of lofty trees, I looked, and beheld lying in the distance, like a bright vision of fairy-land, the palace of the Aranjuez; and nearer still, a light and beautiful Grecian building, which I knew, from the description he had before given me of it, to be the residence of the Marquis Geraldini.

“ ‘ God bless you, Preciosa !’ said the boy in a low and trembling voice; and before I had time to reply, he had darted off with the fleetness of the chamois, and in a few minutes he was out of sight.

“ Here then I stood alone, within sight of my parents’ house, with my mandoline in my hand, and in my gipsy garb; yet I never for a moment doubted that my tale would be credited. I sat down upon a bench by the roadside, and wept bitterly between fear and sorrow—fear, at finding myself lonely and unprotected for the first time—fear also at my future

destiny :—sorrow at having parted from my only friends, without a prospect of ever beholding them again. However, I roused myself after some minutes, and proceeded in the direction which poor Lucan had pointed out to me. I arrived at length within a hundred yards of my father's house ; with a trembling hand I struck a few chords on my mandoline ; and presently I perceived several persons approaching in the direction of the sound, and my heart beat violently as I recognized among them the lady whom I had met at the ridotto in Venice. She leant on the arm of a tall and handsome Spaniard, and by her side walked a beautiful boy of, it might be, six or seven years old, leading by the hand a little girl some years younger. I tried to sing, but my voice trembled ; and I continued to play, till the children had advanced within a few paces of me, and stood with looks expressive of shy curiosity. At length, the boy turned round to Zulema, and made some request, the nature of which I easily guessed, as the Marquis took out his

purse, and drawing thence a piece of gold, gave it to the child, who stepped forward, and slipped it into my hand. ‘And shall I, the elder-born, receive charity within my father’s gates — in view of my father’s halls?’ was my proud and bitter thought; as if it were possible that they should have guessed who I was. Indignantly I flung the piece of gold upon the ground, while tears filled my eyes, and streamed over my cheeks.

“ ‘Poor child!’ said Zulema gently, ‘what can ail her? I believe, truly, it is the same beautiful little girl I admired so greatly in Venice. How lovely and noble-looking, to be the child of a Bohemian!’”

“ ‘I am not the child of a Bohemian,’ I exclaimed, sobbing; ‘the gipsies carried me off; but I am your child — I am your first-born, Leonisa Geraldini.’”

“ ‘Holy Virgin!’ cried Zulema wildly, and turning pale as death; ‘hear what she says, Ferdinand! Was not *our* Leonisa drowned?’”

“ ‘Merciful Providence!’ cried the Marquis;

‘can this be true — or is it the fabrication of some vile impostor?’

“At these words, I sprang upon my feet, surprised and indignant at being doubted, even for a moment. ‘If I am not believed,’ said I, ‘I will return to the gipsy-tent.’”

““She is your image, Ferdinand!” said the Marchioness.

““And those splendid eyes!” said the Marquis; ‘that hair the very shade of yours!—Say, my child, who sent you?—what proofs have you of your birth?’”

“As he spoke, I suddenly released myself from the arms of Zulema, who all the while was on her knees, gazing with intentness into my eyes, as though she tried to penetrate my very soul.

““I will go back to the mountains,’ I exclaimed, ‘and bring those who will certify to the truth of what I say.’”

““Let us all go!” cried Zulema joyfully. ‘Ferdinand, my heart tells me that it *must* be true.’”

“In a few minutes, mounted upon a mule richly caparisoned, with my father and mother

on either side of me, and my little brother and sister following behind, with a numerous suite of attendants, I found myself on my way back to the scenes which I thought I had quitted for ever. It was some time before we discovered the encampment ; at length, a bright fire blazing in the distance caused us to urge on our mules with redoubled speed. Our arrival surprised the Bohemians ; but a few words explained the anxiety of my parents to discover the truth of my story—and how their child, whom they had firmly believed to be drowned, from the body of Almana being afterwards discovered floating on the surface of the river, should be thus miraculously restored to them.

“ ‘ Alas, poor child !’ said Polgar : ‘ this then was thy reception at the house of thy fathers, which thy soul hath panted after ! ’ This thy first trial of the kindness of those who live in society ! ’ Thy word doubted, thyself treated as an impostor, by those who gave thee birth !’

“ ‘ Villain !’ exclaimed the Marquis ; ‘ and wherefore had this trial been sent to her, but

through thy means ! who, if thy tale be true, didst basely ruin the peace of a happy family, and, for the sake of vile lucre, didst steal an unprotected infant from her fond parents !

“ ‘ The truth of the history is easily proved,’ said the chief in a calm tone, ‘ if the likeness of the child to her parents be not proof sufficient.’ And, opening a small wooden box, which was hitherto concealed under a heap of straw and dried sticks, he drew out the diamond cross, which Zulema had tied round my neck on the day in which I was carried off from her. He then related, with scrupulous exactness, every particular connected with the transaction ; coolly explaining his motives, first for carrying me away, and secondly, for restoring me to my parents.

“ ‘ And hast thou no fear of my just resentment ?’ said the Marquis, whose anger had gradually kindled during the narrative, while Zulema had drawn me upon her knee, and was loading me with the most passionate caresses.

“ ‘ Thy resentment !’ said the Waywode con-

temptuously: 'if it be indeed my destiny, to-morrow's sun shall view me hanging from the highest gibbet in Madrid, or racked by the tortures of that civilized institution, the Inquisition. But if it is otherwise written in the book of fate, even that all-powerful tribunal hath no power to harm even a hair of my head; and I am as safe from thy menaces, as if defended by an armed host.'

“ ‘Hear me,’ said I interposing, and throwing myself between my father and the chief. ‘Polgar shall not suffer on my account. It was wicked to carry me off, since it caused the sorrow of my noble parents; but I have been treated kindly, I have lived a happy life, and I am restored, through his means, to a home which I shall value more—much more—than if I had never known another. Pardon him, then, my father; nay, thank and reward him for the care he hath taken of my childhood. Do not deny me the first boon I ever craved.’ As I spoke, my father embraced me, and his sternness gradually relaxed.

“ ‘Go in peace,’ he said to the chief—‘go, while that soft voice yet intercedes in thy behalf.’

“ ‘Alas, poor Preciosa!’ said the old man, without replying to the Marquis; ‘my heart bleeds when I foresee the sorrows that await thee. But I would not cloud thy present happiness by sad anticipation. Once again, farewell. May the true God, whether of the proud Christian, or of the despised Bohemian, watch over thee, curb thy haughty temper, rein in thy violent feelings, and the strong passions which thou dost inherit from thy Moorish forefathers! Thus may thy sad fate be for a while averted. Farewell!’ And, drawing aside the rude curtain of the tent, he motioned us forth with the air of a patriarch-king. With a silent embrace to Zitana, I took the hand of my mother, and we remounted our mules. I had observed that, during the whole conference, Lucan either was, or affected to be, in a profound slumber.

“ I must pass over my feelings of wonder and joy when I found myself establish-

ed in the splendid mansion of my parents,—my astonishment at the manners, and habits, and customs of all around me,—my surprise at the methodical regularity with which every thing appeared to be conducted,—the different light which I soon acquired with regard to my former standards of right and wrong. I must not dwell upon this:—it is a childish and useless procrastination thus to endeavour to lengthen out the period during which I still possess your esteem.”

“I beseech you, dear Señora,” said Gertrude, “to believe with what absorbing interest I listen to your strange adventures,—and methinks, should you indeed have erred so grievously as you would induce me to believe, much may be traced to a childhood undirected, or perhaps misguided.”

“With thoughts such as these,” said Preciosa, “I have too frequently endeavoured to impose upon myself; but I will not deceive you; else might this painful confession have been altogether spared; for wherefore, unless to act

as a warning, should I make it? True, when I first became an inmate of *El Santo Retiro*, the name of my father's residence, my mind was a chaos of unregulated feelings, and wild, unfixed ideas, and confused notions of right and wrong. My religion was that of a savage, — for the Bohemians had no fixed faith. Destiny seemed to be their deity; yet, in the storm, in the sunshine, in all the beauties as well as in the horrors of nature, they acknowledged the power of an unseen and superior Being. The father confessor of Zulema undertook to instruct me in the doctrines of the Christian faith. He was a bigoted and superstitious man, whose idea of religion lay in vain forms alone — at once narrow-minded and intolerant, and concealing the most profound ambition under an affectation of heavenly-mindedness and piety. He possessed an entire power over the mind of the gentle and amiable Zulema; he regulated her actions — he alone directed her conscience. Anxious to bestow some part of her superfluous wealth in relieving the poor in the environs, she

entrusted large sums of money to Father Mendoza. These seldom passed the walls of his own convent, where, under the form of golden candlesticks or rich pieces of plate, they contributed to adorn the splendidly-decorated altar. As the pure and beautiful morality of the Christian religion became unfolded to me, I felt like one emerging from darkness into light ; but, instead of placing unlimited reliance on the opinions of my instructor, and believing implicitly, and without farther inquiry, all that he taught me, I ventured to search and inquire for myself. I proposed questions, — I started doubts which mortified and enraged my spiritual director ; above all, I never could be brought to believe that a fine could atone, in the eyes of God, for the murder of one of his creatures — that bequeathing a sum of money, however large, to a holy institution, could wash away the guilt of a wicked and impenitent life. In short, the holy father found me the most untractable of pupils, and, by his representations of my conduct to the Marchioness, filled

her mind with fear as to my spiritual welfare. My brother and sister were sweet and promising children; and towards them I felt the most unbounded affection. My mother was an angel in mind as in form. I would have died to serve her; and yet I have lived, perchance, to break her heart! But the lofty and stern nature of my father was better suited to my own; and as he condescended to instruct me in matters of which I was profoundly ignorant—to infuse into my mind his own high-souled principles, I looked up to him as to a superior being, and internally vowed never, in thought, word, or deed, to depart from the line of conduct which he had pointed out to me. Thus pride, and not religion, formed my safeguard. I was taught to fear disgrace as worse than death, and to lead an irreproachable life, that the finger of scorn might never be uplifted against me. But, alas! I had no higher motive. I had instruction in painting, in music, in dancing; but how trifling and unimportant did every accomplishment appear to me, in com-

parison with the delight I felt, after much labour, in being able to read with fluency ! I was unfortunately permitted the indiscriminate perusal of all the works that came within my reach, and regarded the world through the false and dangerous medium of poetry and romance.

“ I spent four happy years in this beautiful retreat, at the end of which period my father proposed that I should be introduced into society ; and when I had completed my sixteenth year, we left *El Santo Retiro*, and set out for Madrid. The palace of the Marquis was situated in the *Plaza Major*. The Court being at Madrid, it was at this period the residence of all the principal grandees and hidalgos of Spain ; and the *Prado*, the great resort of the gay and idle, presented an animated and amusing spectacle.

“ The day after our arrival, I accompanied my father and mother to the house of Donna Aurora d’Aranda, whose assemblies were celebrated for the magnificence and good taste with which they were conducted. My father was flattered, and his pride gratified, by the distinguished re-

ception I met with, and by the admiration I received. He was also pleased with the cold dignity of my manners, which I had adopted in compliance with the desire of my instructors, and which formed, in reality, so complete a contrast with the true nature of my feelings. I was enchanted with Donna Aurora, who, without being beautiful, was the most fascinating person I have ever met with; in fact, no other word could exactly describe her. Having been some years in Paris, she had acquired the refined grace, both of manner and dress, which, in truth, I think the ladies of no other country can compete with. The general tone of conversation disappointed me. It appeared insipid and common-place, and sank greatly below my expectations. I believe I had figured to myself, in my notion of polished society, heroes and heroines of romance talking in the language of a *Garcilaso* or a *Montemayor*. At length, I heard a knot of grave politicians discoursing upon a subject that interested me: they talked of the striking character and early promise

of the young Prince of Bearne ; and Donna Aurora, telling me she had in her boudoir a portrait of that heroic boy, as she called him, offered to show it to me. I followed her thither, and, for the first time, I beheld the countenance of Henry of Navarre. When we returned, my companion advanced eagerly to welcome the celebrated poet, Ferdinand de Herrera, who has been surnamed the Divine, the most eloquent and sublime genius who has yet shone upon Spain. With what enthusiasm I regarded the author of poems to which I owed hours and days of the most pleasurable sensations ! The elegance of his manners and appearance did not fall short of the graceful language and the noble delicacy which distinguish all his compositions. How often, in after-days, when wearied with sad thoughts, have I repeated to myself his Ode to Sleep, which he was prevailed upon to recite that evening,—and which begins thus : ‘ Oh ! gentle Sleep, thou who, with lingering flight, dost slowly agitate thy benumbed wings,—who, crowned with pop-

pies, dost softly traverse that heaven so pure, so beautiful, which slumbers also; come towards these distant countries of the West, and bathe my sad eyes with thy holy balm; for, fatigued, subdued by the bitterness of my sorrows, I can find no repose; and so much misery deprives me of all strength to endure farther suffering.*

“ Shortly after this period, I was introduced at the Court of King Philip the Second, *the Demon of the South*, as he is here so justly termed, and was presented to him and his beautiful young Queen. I saw also that unfortunate Prince, Don Carlos, and shall never forget the deep, wild, and settled despair which was expressed in every feature of his countenance, and which seemed almost

* Soave sueño ! tu que en tarde buelo
 Las alas perezosas blandamente
 Bates, de adormideras coronado;
 Por el puro, adormido y vago cielo
 Vien a la ultima parte di Ocidente,
 Y de licor sagrado
 Baña mis ojos tristes, que cansado, &c.

HERRERA.

to amount to insanity. Here likewise I met, for the first time, the Marquis Villabella, one of King Philip's favourites, a man of high family and unblemished reputation. Before I had resided long at Madrid, the Marquis had constituted himself one of my most devoted and most serious admirers; and yet there was scarcely any person with whom I was acquainted, whom I did not consider preferable to him. This feeling certainly had the appearance of caprice; yet the more I endeavoured to combat it, the stronger it became. He was a man between thirty and forty years of age, tall and dark, his features rather good than otherwise, but his expression haughty and disagreeable. He laughed seldom; but his countenance was disfigured by an habitual sneer. His possessions were immense, and his magnificence unbounded. In his dress, equipages, and retinue, he affected an almost sovereign state. My father regarded him with the utmost friendship and respect; and, indeed, it was impossible to refuse paying a tribute of

admiration to his character, which seemed to be faultless. I ought to have been proud of my conquest ; as I was said to be the first lady to whom he had ever paid any marked attention. By his orders, my sleep was nightly broken by serenades performed by the best musicians the town afforded. At the *Prado*, he was our constant escort ; and at length, I was alarmed by hearing it hinted in many quarters, that he had consulted his Royal master on the propriety of making me an offer of marriage ; and that his Majesty had been pleased to express his entire approbation of his intention. I could perceive how brilliant my prospects were considered by my female acquaintances, and how much envy I excited in consequence. But what was to me of far greater importance, I observed that my father and mother viewed his attentions to me with the utmost satisfaction.

The fatal moment at length arrived. Alas ! how vividly is every circumstance connected with it impressed upon my memory ! I was standing upon the balcony, training up some

flowers, when my father entered the room with hurried steps, and called me towards him. ‘Leonisa,’ said he, ‘come hither, my dear child, I would have some conversation with you.’ I turned slowly round, with a prophetic feeling of what was to follow ; and, as if to retard my fate, called his attention to the beauty of some white roses, which I had just pulled. ‘They are very pretty,’ said he, scarcely looking at them, ‘and will make a becoming bridal chaplet. You need not blush, Leonisa ; but come hither, and try if you can guess who, amongst your numerous train of admirers, has proposed for you this morning.’

“ ‘In truth,’ said I, trying to look unembarrassed, ‘I can hardly tell—perhaps the old Count of Villa Real, or the little Duke of B——, or Don Pedro de Carrero.’

“ ‘You are quite wrong,’ said my father, smiling ; ‘for the nobleman who solicits your hand is the only person in Madrid to whom I would joyfully see you united. Now, Villa Real is past eighty ; the Duke, a silly boy

of sixteen, who will never be able to act for himself without the guidance of a tutor or nurse ; and as for Don Pedro, he is a notorious gambler, and, in truth, scarcely ought to be endured in the society of Spanish girls of good birth ; but he of whom I speak is a man of unblemished character, enormous wealth, great interest at Court, high rank, and moreover possessing a handsome person and agreeable manners—in short, my dear Leonisa, your captive is no less a personage than the favourite of the Sovereign, the Marquis Villabella !”

“ ‘ Indeed !’ said I with an air of indifference ; ‘ but I am sorry, my dear father, to hear you express so high an opinion of him, for, to me, he has always appeared particularly disagreeable.’ ”

“ ‘ Leonisa,’ said my father, looking fixedly at me, ‘ can I believe you sincere in this assertion ?’ ”

“ ‘ Perfectly so,’ replied I ; ‘ and therefore I hope you will have the kindness to give him a polite dismissal.’ ”

“ ‘ Assuredly,’ said my father, ‘ in a tone of vexation, ‘ I shall take no such step in compli-

ance with the whims of a capricious and spoiled child. State your objections with regard to him, that I may at least know whether you have any grounds for this apparent folly.'

" 'Nay,' said I, ' I have none ; but that I have always felt an invincible dislike towards him.'

" ' Probably,' said my father, ' you have not before considered the subject ? I imagine that a well-brought up young lady is little apt to concern herself with the character of those by whom she is surrounded. I have no desire to hurry you, Leonisa : I merely wish you to receive the addresses of Villabella. The Saints forbid that I should force your inclinations, even to gratify my dearest wishes !' At these words I threw myself at his feet with the most lively demonstrations of joy.

" ' Answer me one question,' said my father. ' Can it be, Leonisa, that you have any other attachment ? Answer me candidly and truly.'

" ' I solemnly declare, my dear father, that I have none,' replied I ; ' and surely, when you and

my mother have lived without me for so many years, you should not be in so great a hurry to part with me ;' and, as I spoke, my eyes filled with tears.

“ ‘ My dearest child,’ said the Marquis, embracing me, ‘ did parents consult only their own feelings, would they ever part with their children ? But it is my firm belief that the wife of the Marquis Villabella can hardly fail to be the happiest woman in Spain. Trust a little, Leonisa, to the experience of those who have lived longer than yourself. Meantime, I shall give no decided answer to the proposal of Villabella ; I shall refer him to you ; and let him trust to time and his own merit for ultimate success.’ Alas ! it is a hard task to live in constant opposition to the wishes of those whom we love, and to refuse our consent to what we are assured would cause their happiness ; yet such was my untoward fate.

CHAPTER V.

Hushed is the din of tongues : on gallant steeds
With milk-white crest, gold spur, light poised lance,
Four cavaliers prepare for venturous deeds,
And, lowly bending, to the lists advance :
Rich are their scarfs, their chargers featly prance.
If in the dangerous game they shine to-day,
The crowd's loud shout, and lady's lovely glance,
Best prize of better acts, they bear away,
And all that kings or chiefs e'er gain, their toils
repay."

"A BULL-FIGHT, or *Fiestas Reales*, as it was called, was held, towards the beginning of summer, in the *Plaza Mayor*, in honour of the Virgin Mary. A general proclamation invited the nobles to exercise their skill and courage in this perilous adventure. My father and the Marquis Villabella were amongst the cavaliers, or *torreadores*, who, mounted on horseback, made

the first attack upon the bull. The balconies of the houses were covered with scarlet cloth, and were occupied by ladies of the highest distinction. Temporary boxes were raised round the arena; the royal one distinguished from the others by its superior decorations. Thousands of people were assembled round the square; and the most illustrious young noblemen in Madrid, mounted upon beautiful horses, rode round the arena, anxious for the moment that should enable them to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the assembled ladies. Their colours were adapted to their taste and situation; and their devices were expressive of hope or despair, and breathed the spirit of gallantry or arms. My father wore a lion's hide, with the motto, 'Who is stronger than I am?' The Count Villabella was attired in white: his device, 'My faith is as pure.' The day was beautiful and cloudless, and the scene presented the most animated variety.

"The arrival of the unfortunate bull was announced with loud shouts, and noisy acclama-

tions of joy. The halberdiers, who formed the interior circle of the scene, immediately pointed their long lances in a defensive posture; the only barrier which was opposed against the dangerous caprices of the bull. My father was the first combatant; and having inflicted a deep wound in its neck, the irritated animal attacked his horse with such fury, as to overturn him together with his rider. As this accident frequently happens, the foot-combatants, called *chulos*, are generally in readiness to divert the bull's attention from the dismounted and unarmed rider, by shaking before him various pieces of scarlet or blue cloth. The enraged animal, however, would not accept of this substitute, but rushed headlong at my father, who would undoubtedly have fallen a victim to its fury, had not the Marquis Villabella, who was on foot awaiting his turn for the combat, sprung through the barrier, and plunged his lance with so good an aim between the shoulders of the bull, that he staggered and fell. The *matador*

advanced, and gave the fatal blow. The assembled crowd testified their approbation of Villabella's conduct by loud and repeated shouts. The ladies in the boxes and on the balconies waved their handkerchiefs, and threw showers of roses and orange-blossoms into the arena.

“ My father led Villabella towards our box, and presented him to me, saying, ‘ Leonisa, I leave to you the care of thanking, as you ought, the nobleman who has saved your father's life at the risk of his own.’ Zulema, though half-fainting with terror, expressed her gratitude with lively enthusiasm. ‘ How can words avail,’ said I, in answer to my father, ‘ to express the depth of our gratitude ?’—‘ It is true,’ said he significantly ; ‘ and I trust you will hereafter give a more substantial proof of your regard for my noble friend.’ Villabella made a disclaiming bow. ‘ I should regret,’ he said, ‘ to owe to gratitude, any feeling of friendship which the Señora may be pleased to entertain towards me.’ I felt awkward and confused, conscious

that I appeared ungrateful and unfeeling ; and yet fearful of expressing a gratitude liable to be misconstrued into a warmer sentiment.

“ ‘ Now, beshrew me !’ said King Philip, who had watched the scene with angry eyes, ‘ but were we the father of yonder proud maiden, by St. Laurence, but we would bring her to hear reason !’ These words, repeated by the noble lord to whom they were addressed, flew like wild-fire round the circle, until they reached the ears of my father. ‘ Leonisa,’ said he, in a low reproachful tone, ‘ I am a ruined man, and through your means. His Majesty will doubtless resent the indignity with which you are pleased to treat his favourite ; and, by the blessed Saints ! Madrid, nay Spain itself, will be no fit residence for me.’—‘ Dear Leonisa !’ said my mother, ‘ for my sake, endeavour to conquer your foolish dislike to your father’s friend ; and conduct yourself towards him, at least, with civility.’

“ At this moment, Villabella was called away to perform his part in the approaching combat,

and I sat in sorrowful silence, wondering how all this would end. At length, the cruel festivities came to a close, and the departure of their majesties was the signal for all who had any pretensions to fashion, to retire. We followed closely in the train of royalty, and as we came near their Majesties, Queen Elizabeth, who was leaning on the arm of Don Carlos, turned round, and noticed us by a gracious bow. Shortly after, her train becoming entangled, she stopped while it was disengaged, and said to me in a low voice,—‘I would speak with you, Señora.’ I came forward, and, taking my arm, she fixed her beautiful eyes upon me, and said in a hurried voice—

“ ‘We know what is passing in your family, and have observed, this day, the wrath of our royal consort. As a Queen, we should recommend compliance; but as a woman—and here her voice nearly failed her—‘as a woman, and an unhappy one, I would say, if your heart is not Villabella’s, do not marry him. He may be as virtuous and noble-minded as he

seems ; but esteem is not affection.—Believe me, Señora, I feel deeply interested in your fate. Exert all your energy ; refuse him, if you love him not ; and, when you return home, throw yourself on your knees, and thank the Virgin that you were not born a Princess.’

“ The gloomy tones of the Monarch, inquiring the cause of the Queen’s delay, caused her to hurry her steps, and, with a look of mingled sweetness and dignity, she bade me adieu, and was conducted, like a prisoner of state, to her litter.

It would occupy too much of your time were I to lead you step by step through this part of my history. Encouraged by the advice of the Queen, I gave a decided refusal to Villabella ; and the sunshine of royal favour was forthwith withdrawn from the Geraldini family. We returned to El Santo Retiro, my father gloomy and dejected, Zulema unhappy at seeing him so, and I weighed down with sorrow at the thoughts of having only returned to my parents to bring distress and grief amongst

them. My father forbore all reproaches—he was too proud to complain; but his haughty spirit was deeply wounded by the neglect of his Sovereign, and by the loss of Villabella's friendship.

“ One evening towards the end of summer, as I was walking sadly in the gardens, and thinking, as I gazed upon the distant mountains, whether the gipsy's prophecy of my unhappy destiny were not nearly accomplished, I observed a courier ride rapidly into the court, and, in a few minutes, with a face of consternation, Zulema came into the gardens.

“ ‘ My child !’ said she, ‘ I have sorrowful news to communicate. Summon all your fortitude, for our destiny is sadly changed. The Marquis is ruined : an express has arrived from Madrid, bringing accounts of the bankruptcy of the house in which the principal part of his fortune was lodged. He must leave Spain ;—and as for us, Heaven alone knows what our fate may be !’

“ We passed that night in endeavouring to

console each other. I thought but of my parents and the younger children; for myself, I felt that the stroke was nothing. In the morning, a letter was brought to my father: he opened it hurriedly, and, after perusal, put it into my hands. It was from the Count Villabella. He apologized for intruding upon our affliction, but hoped to be forgiven in the name of his former friendship for my father. He offered, in the most friendly and generous manner, to pay my father's most pressing debts, and to become security for the remainder. He treated our difficulties as a mere temporary embarrassment; and ended by renewing, but with much delicacy, his proposals for me. In one part of the letter, he hinted at the possibility of procuring, through his interest, a place at Court, vacant by the death of the Duke of C—.

Assuredly, adversity is the period wherein friendship may be tried. We were charmed with the generous behaviour of the Marquis; and, not to weary you with endless particulars,

I determined to sacrifice my own happiness, and to accept of his proposals. Shortly after, my father obtained the vacant place at Court, and we returned to Madrid.

“ In the church of St. Isidore, and in the presence of the King and Queen, I was united to the Marquis Villabella. I took a sorrowful leave of my parents; and we left Madrid for a splendid castle belonging to the Count, situated in a remote part of Spain. Hitherto, I had merely felt what may be characterised as *griefs of sentiment*—it remained for me to discover the nature of real sorrow.

“ The Castle of St. Leon is situated in the Asturias, and in a portion of that province of Spain which is so fortified by nature, that its inhabitants are capable of resisting almost any number of invaders. It was impossible to avoid being struck with wonder and admiration at the first distant glimpse which I obtained of this stupendous edifice. Situated upon a rocky eminence, and defended from the sharp mountain-blasts by forests of noble trees,—the river Ebro

dashes beneath it, breaking its foaming waves against the precipice.

“As our sure-footed mules pursued their way along the difficult ascents, I had a full view of my future residence ; and my admiration of it appeared to gratify the Marquis, who had spoken but little to me during the journey. We were still about two miles from the castle itself ; and as we rode by the banks of the river, I perceived at some distance, amongst the trees, a beautiful low building, scarcely larger than the houses of the better sort of peasantry, but constructed with a light and elegant simplicity, and ornamented with a degree of taste, which betokened the possessor to be a person much beyond the common class.

“The Marquis, observing that I regarded it with some curiosity, said in a careless tone, ‘ ’Tis a lodge upon the estate, which I have given to Pedro the huntsman.’—At the same moment, we heard a strain of lively music proceeding from the interior of the building. ‘ I understand,’ said the Marquis, ‘ that Pedro

has lately married a pretty German girl—she appears to be a songstress.’ At the same moment, a turn of the road concealed the cottage from our view, and shortly after we arrived at St. Leon.

“During the first month of our marriage, the Marquis appeared to be much attached to me. He gave me, however, none of his confidence, but treated me as a child, or a plaything. When we walked or rode in the environs of the castle, he appeared proud that I excited admiration; after the manner in which a connoisseur in painting is pleased, when his taste in some particular picture meets with public approbation. I could not bring myself to love him; but I felt for him the highest esteem, and blamed myself that his virtues excited in me no warmer feeling towards him. In a short time, his attentions towards me gradually declined, and by degrees he began to absent himself frequently from the castle, leaving me to enjoy, as I best might, its solitary splendour.

“One day, when I requested him to permit me

to walk as far as the huntsman's lodge, which I had never seen since my arrival, he refused my request, in a tone of anger which startled me, adding some bitter expressions about my gipsy propensities not being yet sufficiently eradicated. 'I give you to understand, Señora,' said he, 'once for all, that I would wish the Countess Villabella to conduct herself in a manner suitable to her high birth and station; and though Pedro the huntsman may be an honest man, for aught I am informed to the contrary, I do not consider his acquaintance as peculiarly valuable for a lady of high rank. You need not answer me, Señora; I know what you would say, and have no doubt you are not aware of the degradation to which you would expose yourself, by becoming too familiar with the lower classes. But, besides these considerations, the forest, on the outskirts of which the cottage is built, is believed to be a common haunt of the mountain banditti. I presume I need to add no more.'

"The Marquis had a valet named Lopez, who

enjoyed his entire confidence, to a degree apparently utterly inconsistent with the pride which formed his distinguishing characteristic ; while there was something in the expression of that servant that terrified me against my better reason. He appeared, either by accident or design, to be constantly attached to my footsteps ; and wherever I went, I observed Lopez following me like my shadow. I had no just reason for complaining against him, as he was civil even to servility ; and the Count earnestly recommended him to me as a person of long-trying and certain fidelity.

“ We had resided scarce a year at St. Leon, when it was reported that the Cortes were about to be assembled at Madrid ; on which occasion, it was necessary for all the grandees to be present. On account of my approaching confinement, and the desire of the Count that the heir of his estates should be born at *Castel St. Leon*, he decided upon leaving me there till his return. He was to set off a few days before the arrival of the letter of convocation, alleging, as a reason

for so doing, a desire of showing his zeal for the interests of his country.

“ On the day preceding his departure, I went out to walk in the environs of the castle ; and, on returning homewards, being fatigued with ascending the steep avenue, I sat down to rest in a natural grotto of shells and sea-weed, in which was a rustic bench placed for the accommodation of those who might be fatigued in their ascent to the castle. I had not sitten many minutes, when I heard two persons seat themselves on the outside of the cavern ; and my curiosity was excited by the frequent repetition of my own name. I discovered the voices to be those of the Marquis and of Lopez :—‘ Nay, it boots not talking,’ said the former, ‘ Adelaide must be removed to some surer residence. For the Countess herself, it would matter little ; a few sighs, and, it may be, a shower or so of tears, and she would think no more on it ; but my reputation, good Lopez—my reputation is dearer to me than all the handsome women in Madrid.’ I would now have given worlds to

have left my place of concealment ; but a certain degree of fear, which I could not combat, prevented me from moving, or almost breathing, while the conversation continued.—‘ Good, my Lord,’ said Lopez, ‘ I know that full well ; therefore am I the more surprised that you should thus so often place it in such perilous jeopardy.’

“ ‘ Leave that wonder for the present, in Heaven’s name,’ said the Marquis, ‘ and consider what I must do. Beshrew me, if I am not likely to be involved in a criminal process for marrying two women ; and yet thou knowest, Lopez, how innocent I am of any such crime.’

“ ‘ Why not then,’ said the confidant, ‘ confess to Adelaide at once the deception which has been played upon her ?’

“ ‘ Hold !’ cried the Count, ‘ propose any thing but that I should give up Adelaide—*yet* : at all events, I cannot do so yet !’

“ ‘ And wherefore give her up ?’ said Lopez with a sneer. ‘ Remember Thérèse, and Donna Maria, and Xarifa, the Moorish girl.—Why not add Donna Adelaide to the list ?’

“ ‘ I tell thee, Lopez — if thy dull soul can comprehend thus far,—because she is as different from them as is the wood-dove from the devouring hawk, or the new-born lamb from the cunning and rapacious fox.— True, Thérèse was good and simple, when I first took her from her father’s cottage among the lemon trees; yet had she within her all the elements of a heartless coquette, waiting but for the opportunity that was to bring them into action.— Donna Maria, the high-born Portuguese, who lived and died for love, and gloried in her principles,—what had she in common with the pure-minded Adelaide? — As for Xarifa, the dark-haired Moor, she was, it is true, beautiful and guileless — an interesting savage, but no more. — But Adelaide ! the innocent, the lovely, the refined Adelaide ! when she learns what she will miscall her degradation, she will leave me, as surely as that she now loves me.’ ”

“ ‘ Then, but for your Eminence’s reputation,’ ”

said Lopez, ‘you would leave Donna Leonisa, and prefer the German?’

“‘In good truth would I,’ said Villabella. ‘Leonisa is a masterpiece of nature. Heaven knows the degradation I submitted to, in order to obtain her; and just such as her would I have the Marchioness Villabella. But, alas! the very name destroys the charm. — Look you, Lopez:—were my heir born, and were he a fine and healthy boy, by St. John and the Holy Virgin! I care not if the Marchioness were to take shipping for——’

“‘The other world,’ interposed Lopez, laughing. Here the Marquis and his worthy confidant arose, and departed from their resting-place, and I remained in the grotto with such feelings as you may imagine.

“Fortunately, I have always possessed great command over my feelings, and I constrained myself so far as to meet Villabella as usual. I thanked Heaven, at all events, that I had never loved him; else must I have sunk under the

bitterness of my sorrow. But, when I considered that I must either spend the remainder of my life with this accomplished hypocrite, or bring disgrace upon my family, (or what they would consider as such,) by a public separation from him, my heart died within me, and I knew not in what manner to act. The Marquis took leave of me coldly, but said he regretted the necessity of leaving so much beauty buried in the Asturian mountains. ‘So many beauties,’ added Lopez in a low voice, and with a sly glance at his master.

“When Villabella and his confidant had departed, I sat musing upon the line of conduct suitable for me to pursue. One step I was determined to take, and that was to rescue the unfortunate and innocent Adelaide from the state of unconscious guilt into which she was plunged. Two days had elapsed before I could summon courage to undertake the task, however necessary, of bringing misery upon the head of my injured rival. At length, I set off for the huntsman’s lodge, without attendants, feeling equally fear-

less and careless of the reported danger from the mountain banditti. However, when I reached the outskirts of the forests, I was somewhat alarmed by seeing a man enveloped in a long cloak, with a hat and feather pulled over his face, mounted upon a mule, with a pair of pistols stuck in the holsters, and leading another also saddled. I crept cautiously along under the shadow of the projecting trees, when, hearing the sound of voices approaching in the same direction, I gave myself up for lost. With emotions of the liveliest joy, I suddenly perceived a tree of immense size, hollow in the middle, and the branches rendering it a perfect place of concealment. I had hardly entered, when the footsteps and voices came nearer, and within a few yards where I stood. ‘Farewell, then,’ dear Fernandez!’ said a sweet voice, ‘since it must be so; yet must your sister Donna Leonisa have a heart of stone, if she would receive me as you describe; and truly, though the daughter of a poor German artist was not a suitable alliance for thee, yet was my

father nobly born, and methinks no one needs blush to own him of their kindred.'

" 'Dearest Adelaide!' said a voice, which I knew to be that of the Marquis, 'a thousand times you have heard my reasons and my fears; have patience yet for a while. My father is old, and cannot live many years; nay, this autumn may be his last. Why throw a gloom that may be spared, over the last days of his life, or wound that pride which is the curse of every Spaniard, from the King to the mendicant? Farewell, then, till we meet in the charming retirement which I have prepared for thee in the environs of Madrid. Time passes, and the sun is sinking behind the mountains.—The Saints protect thee till we meet again!'

"I heard poor Adelaide turn away with a convulsive sob; and in a few minutes I found myself alone in the forest of St. Leon.

"It was after sunset when I reached the cottage of Adelaide. All was still around; and I entered a small parterre filled with rare and beautiful flowers, unseen and unquestioned.

When I thought how unwelcome a visitor I should prove to the lovely inmate of the dwelling, I hardly knew how to proceed. Instead of going up to the entry, which was half concealed by the golden fruit and dark-green leaves of the orange-tree, I wandered round, in vain trying to summon courage necessary for the task which I was doomed to fulfil. A soft voice broke in upon the stillness, singing the Evening Hymn to the Virgin. — Methinks I hear the words yet:—

‘ Virgin Mother ! hear me now,
While before thy shrine I bow.
Hear, oh ! hear me, Virgin Queen !
Of radiant and benignant mien—
Ave Maria ! Mother mild,
Listen to thy suffering child !—
Incline thee from thy blessed sphere,
A humble suppliant’s prayer to hear :
Hearken from the realms of light—
Watch us through the coming night.
Oh ! stretch forth thy holy arms,—
Guard us from surrounding harms.—
Oh ! despise not those of earth.
Lo ! thy Son of heav’nly birth
Left for us the realms of light—
Hear, oh ! hear me, Virgin bright !

Ave Maria! oh how pure!

Mother of the God-born child—

Thy name through ages shall endure—

Ave Maria! Virgin mild!

“ I lifted up the latch of a rustic door, and found myself in a small oratory, through which the pale beams of twilight cast an uncertain yet calm radiance. Before a small image of the Virgin Mary knelt a female figure. She was habited in dark green silk; a proportion of fair curls concealed her face from me, as she bent forward in an attitude of fervent devotion. She looked up as I approached, and as she parted her clustering curls, and gazed at me with tearful and wondering eyes, I beheld a countenance so fair, so infantine, and with an expression of such innocent and angelic sweetness, that I could not speak to her; my voice failed me; and, leaning against the altar, I wept bitterly. She sprang from her knees, and, without asking me a question, took my hand with a look of kindness and respect, and kissed it repeatedly.

“ ‘Alas!’ said I, ‘do not receive me thus—I am the messenger of sorrow.’

“ ‘ My father ! Fernandez ! ’ said Adelaide ; as if, in these two names, she comprised all that the world held valuable to her.

“ ‘ It is of Fernandez I would speak,’ said I.

“ ‘ Then,’ said Adelaide, suddenly sinking upon her knees before me, ‘ you are his sister—you are Donna Leonisa:—you, who look like an angel of light, cannot have a heart of stone.’

“ ‘ I am indeed Leonisa,’ said I, raising her up; ‘ but I am not the sister of that false-hearted traitor.’

“ ‘ He a traitor ! ’ said Adelaide, her beautiful eyes glistening with tears of indignation ; ‘ whoever you are, Señora, I will hear no more that you have to communicate.—Fernandez false-hearted ! ’ added she with more vehemence. ‘ Were one from the dead to arise and swear it, I would not believe it.’

“ ‘ Swear not at all, wretched infidel ! ’ said a voice, so hollow, so sepulchral, that even the apparition of the grim countenance of Lopez, which I suddenly perceived at the door-way,

was almost a relief to my fears, unwelcome as was the interruption at that moment.

“ ‘ Begone, Sir !’ said I, turning towards him, ‘ nor venture thus to intrude upon this lady’s privacy.’ Instead of replying, he kept his eyes fixed upon Adelaide ; and when I regarded her, I was surprised by seeing her grow deadly pale, while she returned the glance of Lopez with a look of wild affright — her every feature expressive of agonized emotion.

“ ‘ Leopold !’ at length she exclaimed. ‘ My brother ! do the graves indeed give up their dead ? — and hast thou appeared to accuse Fernandez ?’

“ ‘ Gracious God !’ said I, ‘ her brother ! and the abettor of this villainy.’

“ ‘ What villainy ?’ cried Adelaide. ‘ In the name of Heaven, speak ! let me know the worst. Leopold ! if thou art indeed my brother, speak, protect me ; say, how art thou here, whose death we mourned ?’

“ ‘ I am indeed Leopold,’ said the man : ‘ but why talk of myself ? I left Germany, as

thou knowest, with several other wild and headstrong youths. In our wanderings we fell in with a party of banditti; suffice it to say, we joined them. I spread a report of my death, and became their leader. We were in the pay of several powerful noblemen of Spain; but being taken prisoner in an affray with a military force, I was thrown into the Inquisition, the Cortes imagining that, through my means, some important secrets might be laid open. The fortitude with which I supported the third torture attracted the admiration of his Eminence the Marquis Villabella; through his all-powerful influence I was pardoned, and became attached to him for life. This happened about the time of his marriage with Donna Leonisa.'—At these words Adelaide looked wildly around her, and then, sinking upon her knees, covered her face with her hands.—'He confessed to me,' added Lopez, 'that he had imposed upon a young German girl by a false marriage, which had deceived her old father, as well as herself. He desired me to watch the footsteps of Donna Leonisa, in

case accident should direct them towards Adelaide's dwelling. Yes! he called her Adelaide; but fool! wretched fool that I was! the idea of my sister did not, for a moment, cross my imagination.'

" 'For that, may Heaven be thanked!' said Adelaide in a hollow voice.

" He recounted to me the adventures of his past life, and how he had contrived to preserve an unsullied reputation, while leading a life of which even a robber would be ashamed. As Heaven is my witness, these eyes never beheld Adelaide until this day; when she accompanied the Marquis, contrary to her usual custom, even to the outskirts of the forest. The punishment of my crimes began from that hour.

" Here Lopez ceased; for the unfortunate girl, who had taxed her strength to the uttermost, now fell forward with a piercing cry, and lay prostrate before the altar, in a state of total insensibility.

" 'Lopez,' said I, as I supported her in my arms, 'if not utterly hardened by crime, thou

wilt restore thy sister to her aged father, if he yet lives — thou wilt rescue her from a state of unmerited degradation. So may the memory of one good deed soften the bitter recollection of thy past sins.'

" 'Alas, poor Adelaide!' cried he, 'whom I left a happy child — whom, like a base unmanly villain, I deserted. I swear by all the blessed Saints, by the holy and immaculate Virgin, to devote the remains of this wretched life to thee, and to my father, if he will not recoil from me with horror. Were it not best, lady, to carry her from this accursed habitation, ere her senses return to her?'

" At these words, Adelaide opened her eyes, and, disengaging herself from me, stood upright. Her face was pale as death, but her manner was composed, and her voice firm.

" 'My brother,' she said, 'let us go hence — to thee I commit myself. — While my father lives, I have yet a duty to perform; when he dies, a convent shall hide my shame. In the eyes of the world, I am degraded for ever,—but

Heaven knows my heart ! Farewell, bride of Fernandez ! Let not a softening recollection flit across my thoughts. Take me hence, Leopold, from this abode of guilt.'

" We assisted her into the open air. There was something in the composure of her manner that frightened me. The blow seemed to have struck her heart. She allowed Leopold to make some hurried preparations ; but would not look again at the house, at the garden, or at any thing belonging to her dwelling. She hurried onwards through the forest, until the trees concealed it from her view. Mules were quickly procured ; and every accommodation that the shortness of the time would permit, was arranged by Lopez. Adelaide spoke little—a few short disjointed sentences, expressive of her desire to put the distance of leagues between her and St. Leon, as soon as might be.

" ' I will write,' said she, as, after silently embracing me, she allowed Lopez to place her upon her mule. ' If I spoke or wept, I could go no farther.'

“ When they were out of sight, I remained like one who has half awakened from a dream, doubting the reality of all that had passed. How I reached the castle, I hardly know. That night, I was taken alarmingly ill ; and the next day I became the mother of an infant, who might, had he lived, have consoled me for many sorrows. But, alas ! he died in a few days after his birth.

“ When I had sufficiently recovered, I wrote to the Marquis, and gave him a detailed account of all that had happened. I forbore all reproaches, but wrote calmly and circumstantially, without comment or observation. I ended, by requesting that a separation should take place ; hurting, as little as possible, the feelings of my parents.

“ His answer was characteristic. He did not appear to feel much regret for the loss of Adelaide, but seemed to rejoice that the affair had been so quietly managed ; heaping reproaches however upon Lopez, and expressing some sorrow for the death of his infant.

“ With regard to the proposed separation, he agreed to it with pleasure, provided it might be concealed from the eyes of the world. In a few days he wrote again, to inform me that he had procured for me the situation of lady of honour to Queen Catherine de Medicis, and that, in order to deaden all suspicion, he would travel to Paris at the same period with me, and in a separate equipage, if I deemed it most suitable.

“ I agreed to all this, and, having journeyed to Madrid, took leave of my parents with an affected appearance of gaiety that completely deceived them. I quitted Spain, envied by all my female acquaintances, and regarded by them as a model of happiness in married life.

“ The Queen alone, as I took leave of her, said to me in a low voice, — ‘ Perfect felicity is not our lot upon earth ; and, therefore, your’s is not what it might have been ; you have yet much for which to thank Heaven. Continue in the path of duty, dear Señora, and you will never be wretched.’

CHAPTER VI.

You will proceed in pleasure and in pride,
Beloved, and loving many ; all is o'er
For me on earth, except some years to hide
My shame and sorrow deep in my heart's core.

BYRON.

“ WHEN we arrived in France, I was directed to join the Queen-Mother at Montauban, where the two courts, being at that time, as they are at present, on amicable terms, had united for purposes of festivity and pleasure. I had travelled in a separate carriage from the Marquis ; and, I confess, my indignation and disgust knew no bounds, when I found that a low female singer, whom he had met at Madrid,

had accompanied him to France, in the disguise of a valet. I now determined to banish him, if possible, even from my thoughts, — to find my happiness elsewhere than in domestic life, since its pleasures were denied me, — to deaden the recollection of my unhappy situation, by partaking of all the gaieties and amusements which a residence at the splendid court of Queen Catherine de Medicis put within my reach.

“ I was too ignorant of the world to be aware of the danger to which such a line of conduct would necessarily expose a young woman neglected by her husband. I was accustomed to consider admiration as my due; and having, on that account, no anxiety to obtain it, I imagined that I was indifferent to it. I was received by Queen Catherine with open arms; and was flattered by the reception I met with, without having the most remote idea of the cause.

“ When I tell you that I was then considered beautiful, Heaven knows I do so without feeling any pride in a gift which proved to me so

fatal. Yet I was not beautiful as you are ; and different besides — quite different. One may look in your blue eyes, as in the waters of a clear lake, and view in their calm light the reflection of your pure and innocent mind ; whereas I was taught to conceal my feelings—to smile when sad at heart—to wear an unmoved and calm aspect when torn by conflicting emotions. I was proud of the mastery which I imagined I had obtained over my feelings, and regarded, with a mixture of surprise and contempt, the unfortunate woman who wavered, but for a moment, in the path of duty. Meanwhile, fêtes, ballets, masques, balls followed one another in rapid succession. Night was turned into day ; and pleasure formed the business of our existence. The Marquis was recalled to Madrid. He parted from me with the most perfect apathy, and I saw him no more.

“ The King of Navarre had hitherto been absent. One evening the Queen-Mother summoned me to her presence-chamber, and presented me to him with a pointed earnestness in

her manner which surprised me. She took every opportunity of bringing me into his company ; and one day, when I was alone with her, said, assuming an air of the most frank confidence, — ‘ To tell you the truth, dear Señora, I am at this moment desirous of making you my instrument in a political point of view. Are you anxious to forward my designs ?’

“ I begged her Majesty to explain herself more clearly.

“ ‘ No one,’ said this female Machiavel, ‘ regrets more than I do the miserable dissensions by which France is now agitated — my second country, which I love as I would a kind and indulgent stepmother — but, alas ! our Lady knows how frequently my best intentions are frustrated, and how, when I wish for peace, and have at length concluded a truce, even upon terms disadvantageous to our own party, some fatal mischance brings war and all its horrors to separate and make enemies of those destined by Heaven never even to live asunder. Even now it is on the point of breaking forth,

and, to avert its fatal consequences, requires a skill far beyond my poor talents — a wisdom more than human. Yet, shall I not exert the power with which Heaven has entrusted me, in order to maintain tranquillity amongst the children of men? The arms of a woman are persuasion and winning eloquence — and these feeble arms may be of more benefit to her country than the courage, the strength, and the personal bravery, wherein the male creation glory. Could I by any means attach to our side the King of Navarre, whom I love, rebellious as he is, with all the tenderness of a fond parent, half the work were then completed; but the ungrateful boy distrusts me, often despises my offers, and suspects my motives. I have observed you, Señora, since you came to our court; how, under the form of an angel, and with feminine manners, you conceal a masculine spirit, and an unbending heart. This, added to extraordinary talents, renders you the person fitted for my purpose. As you and his Majesty are both married persons, there is neither

danger nor indelicacy in the task which I propose. I would have you to obtain the friendship and confidence of the King of Navarre ; to exert all the eloquence which you possess to fix him to our party ; to describe to him the advantages of a lasting peace ; and, especially, to induce him to continue his residence here. Your motives will be unsuspected by him,—and, if you succeed, you will have the glory of performing for the interests of France, what I have not been able to succeed in.’

“ I believe I have already told you, that pride was my besetting sin ; and truly, it was gratified to the utmost, in finding myself selected as the confidant of the ablest and most accomplished woman of the age, a Queen also ; and one who was regarded by the Spaniards as a model of talents and virtues. I promised compliance with her Majesty’s commands. The snare was covered with flowers : whilst I vainly imagined that I was serving the interests of France, I was an instrument in the hands of an intriguing woman. I devoted myself to the

study of politics ; and, mistaking the true destiny of a female, rejoiced that I was freed from all domestic ties, and was thereby enabled to turn my whole thoughts to matters of higher import. I sought every opportunity of conversing with the King of Navarre ; and imagined that he revered my talents as a politician, whilst he merely felt for me the admiration with which beauty seldom fails to inspire him. Having, however, persuaded him to take a step regarded by the Queen-Mother as most essential to her interests, I henceforth became an especial favourite and confidante ; and, dazzled by the praises which she lavished on me, determined to persevere in the new and brilliant career which seemed opened to my view. But her Majesty, unlike her usual penetration, had mistaken my character ; and, too soon throwing off the mask wherewith she veiled her mind from vulgar eyes, discovered to me a system of policy which dissolved the enchantment. Ambition the most inordinate and excessive was the basis ; and, to aggrandize herself and her family, she

hesitated at the performance of no action which could hasten the end she had in view, be the consequences to others what they might. As one who opens the door of a marble sepulchre, and finds that the beauteous fabric is but the palace of Death, so did I recoil with horror as the false and crooked designs of the ambitious and intriguing Queen were laid open to my view. I soon discovered that the whole of her young and brilliant suite were employed by her for the express purpose of amusing those whose thoughts it was necessary for her to discover; that while she diverted princes and noblemen from all serious thoughts, and enchanted them by the charms of *her* maids of honour, Queen Margaret frequently opposed to her the same artifices, and, by the superior attractions of her retinue, gained over to her own party the noblemen of her mother's Court. As all the meanness and revolting perfidy of the Court became revealed to me, I gradually fell from the clouds in which I had soared, and felt at once indignant and humbled at the

degrading part which I had been called upon to perform.

“ My residence with her Majesty now became odious to me; and whilst I was considering in what terms to give in my resignation, I received intelligence that the Marquis Villabella was no more. He was stabbed in the streets of Madrid by an unknown hand. His assassin remains undiscovered to this hour. I retired to a convent, to spend there the first years of my widowhood. I carried with me but one pleasing recollection. I thought of the noble character of the King of Navarre, who, as if guided by an unseen hand, calmly pursued his course amidst the thousand dangers which environed him. I thought of him as the one golden thread interwoven with the dark tissue of my sorrowful life; and sometimes, as I looked through the convent bars at the pure and calm moon moving majestically through the heavens, and ever shining forth serenely, in spite of the dark and angry clouds which were blown across her disc by the stormy winds, I said to my-

self, ‘ Just so is the young King ; and though the storms of civil war obscure his fate, and dangers and death environ him, yet, even like the silver moon, he will come forth unharmed and glorious—the brighter, that, to the common gaze, his fate has seemed obscured for a while, and his fortunes clouded by adversity.’ In the solitude of my convent, I continued to nurse my enthusiastic admiration. The King of Navarre was the idol whom I worshipped, and whom my imagination painted as a faultless hero. At the end of two years, I began to feel wearied of my residence at the convent ; the petty occupations and dull unvarying pursuits of the nuns appeared to me devoid of interest ; and, in my restless spirit, I felt that I had hitherto sought after happiness, but that, like a vain phantom, she had eluded my grasp.

“ One evening, an unusual noise was heard in the court of the convent. The opening of the gates was followed by the trampling of horses, the doors of the chapel were thrown open, and Queen Catherine de Medicis entered, followed by a nu-

merous retinue. The nuns lowered their veils, and retreated precipitately at the sight of the famous *panache blanche* of the King of Navarre. Queen Catherine announced her intention of withdrawing me from the convent, in a gentle tone, but in decided terms.

“ ‘We come,’ she said, ‘to reclaim our Lady of Honour; we cannot afford to lose so bright and particular a star even out of our firmament of beauties.’

“ I thanked her Majesty for her condescension, but observed, that I had some intention of returning to my native country.

“ ‘It will be but a melancholy residence,’ said the Queen. ‘After the Parisian Court, all others show like the abodes of hermits or Goths; that of Spain is splendid, but dull. At all events, Señora, come with us for the present.’

“ I remained still undecided, when the King of Navarre advanced, and said to me in a low voice—

“ ‘Señora, for my sake, return to Paris,

and be to me what you once were — the polar star whereby my wandering steps may be directed. I am at this moment overwhelmed with troubles. Grant me a gleam of happiness !’

“ I hesitated. The Abbess smiled sarcastically. I took the arm of the King, and was conducted in triumph to the royal carriage. The destiny of our life sometimes depends upon the most simple step taken without reflection.

Various changes had taken place in the court since my departure. A species of reconciliation had been brought about between the King of Navarre and Marguerite de Valois, who was now at Paris with her magnificent suite. The Duke of Anjou, our present King, was then preparing to leave France, in order to take possession of the throne of Poland. The Queen-Mother told me in confidence, that he would not remain long there, as a bright flame had appeared to her,—the fatal omen by which, it is said, the death of her children is always predicted to her. It needed, however, no augur

to foresee the death of King Charles the Ninth. His health had gradually declined ; the hand of Heaven was upon him ; and since the Saint Bartholomew, no smile had been seen to illumine his sombre countenance.

“ The day after our arrival at Paris, the Polish Ambassadors made their entry into the capital, accompanied by all the French nobility, who had escorted them from Metz. The contrast of their appearance with that of the Parisians was striking ; and methought the French noblemen showed like effeminate and perfumed courtiers, when contrasted with the martial-looking Polanders, with their wild appearance, their tall stature, their long beards, their fur caps sparkling with jewels, and the long and bended scymitars, unknown in the French service. At this audience, I, for the first time, beheld the Queen of Navarre, and was bewildered by her dazzling and splendid beauty. Her striking likeness to her sister, the Queen of Spain, prejudiced me in her favour ; yet methought her beauty, though infinitely more daz-

zling, was of a less interesting character. The Ambassadors appeared lost in astonishment on being introduced into her presence ; her superb dress, and the splendour of the entertainment increased their admiration. She was habited in her favourite costume of Spanish crimson velvet, covered with diamonds, and the Spanish hat and plumes with which she is represented in her portrait. Sieradski exclaimed, as he retired—

“ ‘ After beholding such beauty, there is nothing in this life for which I would desire to exist. Like the Turkish pilgrims who, after having seen the tomb of their Prophet, burn out their eyes, disdaining to behold any inferior object, so would I willingly doom myself to perpetual blindness from this hour.’ ”

“ Her learning surprised, while her beauty charmed them ; and truly, in a court where the greatest noblemen can with difficulty write their signature, it was surprising to hear a young Princess reply to the Bishop of Cracow in a long and elegant Latin discourse, while the in-

terpreter, also, was a woman,—the celebrated Madame d'Aunebant.

“ In the fête which was afterwards given in the Tuilleries gardens, I was chosen as one of the sixteen nymphs who represented the sixteen provinces of France ; and was named by Queen Margaret to recite the verses which Ronsard and Durat had composed in honour of the King of Poland. You smile at the idea of verses in honour of Henry the Third ; but he was not always the weak and indolent Prince that he now is. He did not always spend his nights in dancing, his mornings in mending his clothes, and the rest of the day in walking in religious processions, or adding to his collection of little dogs. He was then plunged in melancholy ; and the sadness of princes seldom fails to render them interesting. We feel almost surprised when we find that they are subject to the common infirmities of nature ; and when they die, methinks it is more affecting to think that the hand which wielded the sceptre shall now grasp but dust, — that the Royal robe has

been exchanged for the winding-sheet, — that worms feed upon the regal brow,—than when the poor man is taken from the chilling world, and laid to repose in his humble grave. Far from being flattered by his election to the throne of Poland, the Duke of Anjou employed every means in his power for delaying his departure. Deeply attached to the beautiful Mary of Cleves, Princess of Condé, a throne unshared by her had no charms for him ; and when, after having bidden a mournful adieu to the shores of France, he arrived at his palace in Cracow, his first act was to give the Princess a barbarous proof of the strength of his attachment, by sending her a packet of letters written with his own blood.

“No princess is more fascinating than the Queen of Navarre, when it is her object to please. Alas ! were her virtues equal to her beauty and talents, who upon earth would be her equal ? Who so worthy of being united to Henry of Navarre ? I was deceived and blinded with regard to her character, as I had been by

that of the Queen-Mother. It has been my fate through life to meet with unrequited attachment: perhaps I should say, I attach myself unworthily. Yet even now I may render her the justice to say, that her faults are the faults of the age she lives in — she had been more than angel, had she passed unharmed through the temptations which, since the age of thirteen, have encircled her steps. Her intriguing character descends to her naturally from her mother; her genius, her decided turn for literature, her vanity and love of glory, have passed as it were from the spirit of Francis the First, to animate the soul of his grand-daughter. Her affability, caprice, and inconstancy characterise her as they did her father, Henry the Second. Her life is passed in the extremes of pleasure or devotion. With other examples before her eyes, her name might have graced the page of history; as it is, her character will descend to posterity, traced in the darkest colours. Her generosity and magnificence are unbounded; and her misfortunes must excite our compassion,

however merited. Far from seeming jealous of the admiration which the King of Navarre expressed for me, she encouraged it by every means in her power ; and this conduct, which I then considered a proof of a generous and confiding character, was in fact caused by her utter indifference to her husband, to whom she was sacrificed by the ambition of others, when she had given her heart to the Duke of Guise. The Queen-Mother spoke truly, when she exclaimed, ‘ *Ma fille est malheureuse d’être venue en tel siècle !*’

“ From this period my history begins to darken. Let me pass over the remainder of it rapidly. We cannot live in the midst of corruption, and with daily examples of vice before our eyes, without becoming, to a certain degree, affected by it. The principles may not change ; but the ear becomes accustomed to the tone of immorality, which is a distinguishing characteristic of corruption. We recoil from it at first with horror and disgust ; but if, after the first

feeling of virtuous indignation, we do not fly from it, it is that we are beginning to be reconciled to it. This may seem a hard truth ; but, to a certain extent, it is the case with all who frequent the court-circles. The magnificence, the pleasure by which they are surrounded, the high rank and dazzling beauty of those whose conduct is so censurable, are the snares which the young and inexperienced can scarcely escape from, without the guiding hand of a watchful parent. Why should I mention the artifices that were employed against me? Why sully your pure mind with an account of what nearly drives me to desperation even to reflect upon? I might appear less criminal in your eyes ; but it is not a justification of my actions that I make : it is a confession of my guilt. Lady de Frontenaye ! I have said that I was proud ; behold me then humbled to the very dust ! To you, and for your sake, I confess, what I had hoped should be buried with me in the silent grave, — *I was innocent — I am guilty !* I am

unworthy to remain in your presence. From the hour in which I lost my own esteem to the present moment, my life has been one lengthened chain of misery."

Preciosa ceased, for she had fainted: when she recovered, it was to find herself in the arms of Gertrude, who bathed her temples, and supported her with the utmost kindness.

"Let me continue, while I have breath to speak," said Preciosa, in a low and hurried tone, and with a wildness in her eye almost like that of delirium. "If respect, attention, and devoted attachment, could have reconciled me to a life of guilt, all these I received from the King of Navarre. Alas! that we should make idols unto ourselves of the creatures of this world! He for whom I had sacrificed my happiness both here and hereafter, was, in my eyes, more than mortal. His divorce from Marguerite of Valois began to be publicly rumoured; and was by himself anxiously desired. Business called him to Bearne, and I was left in a society which I had never liked, but which now was odious to me.

Though my crime was unknown, the consciousness of guilt haunted me like a shadow. A word in praise of virtue seemed levelled at me ; a light tone of conversation, a marked disrespect. Those whom, in the days of my pride, I had regarded as my inferiors in beauty or talent, I now scarce dared to look at. Those whom I had shunned from a dislike to their manners and principles, seemed, to my jaundiced eye, to regard me with a triumphant and contemptuous air. Madame de Sauves, especially, I fancied addressed me in a sarcastic and familiar tone, such as I had never before observed. Thoughts of sorrow and self-abasement were before me day and night. I spent my nights in tears ; and in the day-time I wore a forced look of happiness, which but ill concealed the wretchedness of my feelings. I received letters from the King of Navarre ; and even in the midst of their kindness, I thought, with bitterness, how secondary a rank I held in his thoughts, when compared with the excitement and interest which he felt in the performance of his arduous public duties.

“ All these feelings of misery began to have an influence upon my appearance ; and when King Henry returned, I imagined that his eye expressed pity for me, but no other sentiment. I tried to blind myself to this ; and when I found that my grief and tears vexed and surprised him, I forced myself to appear gay. In his absence I had neglected my dress. I now studied how to appear to the greatest advantage. I exerted all my talents to amuse and interest him. I became the most distinguished dancer in all the ballets with which it was Queen Catherine’s pleasure to amuse her nobility. I displayed my talent in singing, which had hitherto lain dormant ; and when the room rang with plaudits, and all envied my success, I sought the only eye whose approval was of consequence to me, and turned from the rest with cold indifference.

“ But, alas ! he knows not, though the experience of his early years might have taught him, what woman’s love is. Measuring all by such standards as Madame de Sauves, or Mar-

guerite de Valois, he knows no higher models. Yet, is it for me to complain? Is it for me to murmur, though the phial of Divine wrath should continue to be, as it were, drop by drop poured out against me? You may ask why, with these feelings of remorse, I did not withdraw from Court? Alas! I had not resolution sufficient to banish myself from the place where *he* resided. When I had formed the determination of retiring from the world, and of spending the remainder of my life in penitence and devotion, one kind word would break through my resolution; and thus I continued, from day to day, until the blow was struck which has sealed my fate for ever. I had given to King Henry a bracelet, containing a miniature portrait, which was taken of me at the desire of the Queen-Mother, soon after my arrival at Paris."

"I have seen it," said Gertrude, in a low voice.

"You have seen the picture," said Preciosa, sighing; "but you have not heard the oath of eternal fidelity which was sworn over it. The

oath is broken—the picture destroyed. Time has effaced the remembrance of the one ; the waters of the Durance flow over the other.

“ A celebrated astrologer, or fortune-teller, made his appearance in Paris. Queen Catherine, who to a masculine mind unites the excess of superstition, was desirous of consulting him upon the issue of her famous project of placing upon the throne of France, in default of all direct posterity from her sons, the children of her daughter Claude, Duchess of Lorraine. As you may believe, the utmost caution was necessary in introducing the astrologer to her private cabinet. The Princess of Condé and I were the only persons admitted, when the interview took place. We were, indeed, not absolutely present, but were seated in adjoining apartments, to prevent the interruption of all intruders. The astrologer passed through the room where I was seated alone, and as he passed, and bent before me as if in salutation, he said in a low tone—

“ ‘ Grant me an interview this night alone : I will reveal to you the destiny of your life—

the hour, midnight — the place of meeting, the Queen's oratory — the watch-word, Henry of Navarre.'

" I started ; and as I advanced to usher him into the Queen's presence, waved my hand in token of dissent. The astrologer turned round, and fixing his dark eyes upon me, said—' I will give you a token—*The days have come in which you regret your gipsy life, and wish you had remained for ever in their tents ;*' and, passing into the Queen's chamber, he left me lost in astonishment.

" After much hesitation, the hour of midnight found me awaiting the arrival of the magician in my private oratory. As the church of Nôtre-Dame chimed the twelfth hour, he entered ; and, throwing off the cloak in which he was enveloped, whilst he held up a lamp to his wild features, I knew again, in spite of the march of time since the interval when I had last beheld him, the playmate of my childhood, Lucan, the gipsy-boy ! In a moment, the scenes of my infancy were conjured up as by

a vision ; I was again in the sunny vales of Italy, on the Alpine precipice, on the shores of the Danube, or wandering among the Carpathian mountains.

“ ‘ Lucan ! the companion of my early years ! is it, indeed, you ? ’

“ ‘ I am Lucan, indeed and in truth, *Marqueza* ; ’—and there was something bitter in his tone as he spoke.

“ ‘ Lucan ! ’ I exclaimed, ‘ when we last parted near *El Santo Retiro*——’

“ ‘ We did not expect to meet again in the palaces of kings,’ said Lucan calmly.

“ ‘ And the chief, and Zitana ? ’

“ ‘ The Waywode, our father, is no more :—his spirit, formed of particles of fire, has perhaps returned to mingle with its native element. He was killed in a mortal struggle with a ferocious bear, whilst I was absent upon an expedition of plunder. Zitana has joined another horde of Bohemians, and wanders through the Pyrenees. I have, as you see, become a necromancer,—a profitable trade, in sooth. This diamond ring

was given me by the Princess of Condé. But I did not come here for an idle purpose. Marchioness of Villabella, daughter of the House of Geraldini ! rouse thyself from thine apathy—awake—arise—and hear me ! The day wherein I parted from you, I swore, and bound myself by the oath among us so sacred, that, like an unseen spirit, I would watch over thee, would protect thee from danger, would avenge thee of thine enemies, and avert the dark destiny predicted to thee by the Waywode, as far as in me lay. But I was a boy, and, what was worse, a gipsy-boy ; I am now a man, ay, and have proved it, as this cold steel can testify. To see thee, I have braved death and danger ; and I now stand before thee, bound to thy service, with hand and heart in this world, and, if such there be, in worlds yet to come.’

“ His eye was wild, and his countenance, before pale, was flushed and inflamed ; and I trembled at the tone of his voice.

“ ‘ Lucan ! ’ I said gently, ‘ I thank thee for this devotion to me ; but in what do I require

such protection,—against whom should I be protected ?”

“ ‘Against thyself,’ replied he ;—‘ against thyself first ; and, secondly, against those who betray thee. Look not thus sternly, Preciosa ; he who swore to thee eternal fidelity has broken his oath ; he to whom thou gavest thy portrait has forgotten thee ; another occupies his thoughts, his time, his heart. Under the disguise of a Troubadour, he tries to captivate the affections of a young and noble orphan ; and whilst thou weepest for his absence, and dost offer up, daily and nightly, prayers to the Queen of Heaven for his safe return, thou art forgotten, neglected, despised. Yet this is the good, the great Henry of Navarre ! This is he whom ages to come will deify ! God of my fathers ! defend me from bowing the knee to such an idol.’ ”

“ Lucan might have continued to speak without interruption from me ; I sat motionless, heart-stricken, and bowed to the earth with shame. I had sunk into a kind of stupor, when

I was roused by a voice close to my ear, saying to me in a whisper, which I shall never forget, ‘Wilt thou be revenged?’ I screamed aloud; and expected to see another form than Lucan’s, when I ventured to lift my eyes. But he alone stood there, calm and pale, and awaiting my reply. I roused all my energies; and, seizing the arm of the astrologer, I made him follow me to the crucifix.

“ ‘Lucan!’ I exclaimed, ‘I know not your intention—I will not hear your meaning; a horrid, dark, and treacherous light is in your eyes, but I will not believe it; but if you will not kneel before that blessed crucifix, and, laying your hand upon that Holy Book, swear by all that is on earth held most sacred, that for me no drop of blood shall be shed by you, no revenge whatsoever taken upon any human being, be my wrongs what they may, I will, in my turn, take an oath by all the blessed company of Heaven, that I will denounce you as a murderer, ay, though I should meet with death the next moment as an accomplice in your intended guilt!’

“ A bitter smile passed over the features of Lucan ; and he slowly repeated the words prescribed.

“ ‘ ’Tis well,’ he said ; ‘ thy Royal idol is safe. Yet I have not studied the stars to no purpose ; and they tell me that thou wilt not tamely submit to desertion ; ay, and by the bright welkin ! revenge will come, slower, but more sure than by my hand. I see it even now — his fate written in characters of blood. The assassin’s steel shall slay the hope of France.—Adieu ! unfortunate daughter of a noble house !’ he added, in a softened tone. ‘ Preciosa, thy heart is breaking ; I would have served thee before I dissolve this miserable existence ; but it may not be. For thy sake, I shall yet preserve my life for a certain period ; that expired, I shall return to the nothing from whence I came.’

“ A noise was heard, whilst the astrologer spoke.

“ ‘ He comes !’ said he. ‘ Farewell !’

“ And as I gazed at him in vacant horror, he

swept past me. I listened to his retreating footsteps. A gust of wind extinguished my lamp, and I was left in darkness. I endeavoured to find my way back to my own apartment, which was at some distance from that part of the Louvre. Two private staircases lead from the oratory, the one conducting to the chamber of the Queen-Mother and her suite; the other, to the apartments of Marguerite de Valois. In the darkness I mistook the stair, and entering what I believed to be my own room, found myself in the cabinet of the Queen of Navarre. Every thing was now still in the palace; and, fearful of awakening any one who might discover me wandering along the passages at that hour of night, I threw myself down on a sofa, concealed by the drapery of the window, and determined to wait patiently till daybreak. A light streaming under the door alarmed me, and presently the door of the room in which I was concealed was cautiously opened, and, to my surprise, the King of Navarre, whom

I believed to be absent, entered, followed by the Baron de Rosny.

“ ‘ Look you, Rosny,’ said the King, ‘ if she will consent to espouse me, I swear, on the faith of a King and a gentleman, that she shall be Queen of Navarre ’

“ ‘ And her Majesty?’ said Rosny inquiringly.

“ ‘ The poorest man in the realm,’ answered the King, ‘ would not be refused a divorce under similar circumstances.’

“ ‘ The poorest man in the realm, Sire,’ said Rosny gravely, ‘ would have but his own happiness to consult — your Majesty must consider the welfare of others. However, if Mademoiselle de Frontenaye be as you represent her, she would spurn even a throne so obtained.’

“ ‘ She is an angel in appearance,’ said King Henry; ‘ but she is human. And what woman ever existed, who was not ambitious of rank and wealth? I would do, and Heaven knows I have proved it, much for the welfare of my country; I would expose my person, I would

lay down my life, ay, a thousand times, to rescue them from oppression, to ensure their prosperity. But when it is in question to sacrifice my private happiness to an absurd prejudice, methinks I have a right to complain. Great God! shall I be reduced to envy the happiness of the meanest peasant? and, because I am of royal birth, dare I not aspire after domestic felicity?"

" 'Recollect, Sire,' said Rosny sarcastically, 'that it is scarcely more than three months since the Spanish lady occupied your whole thoughts. Before that, it was Madame de Sauves, if my memory be not treacherous. In three months more, 'twill probably be another.'

" You may imagine my feelings when King Henry replied—

" 'The Señora Villabella is a comet — dazzling, surprising; one may live a century, and not see another. She appeared before me like a flash of lightning, painfully brilliant. But she is too lofty for the common affairs of life. I admire her, but I do not love her. I trust she

will never leave the train of De Medicis ; for, by the mass ! they are like a gallery of fine paintings, whereof the Marchioness is the rarest, and by the greatest master.'

" ' But,' said Rosny, ' should she not follow the example of inconstancy which your Majesty has given her ? Should she persist in her attachment to you ?'

" ' *Foi de Dieu !*' said the King ; ' that would be embarrassing. At the same time, there is no reason why, by marrying Mademoiselle Frontenaye, I should lose the friendship of the Marchioness !'

" ' I confess, Sire,' said Rosny, ' in the present instance, my penetration is at fault as to the nature of your Majesty's sentiments. The truth seems to be, your vanity, Sire, is flattered, that the most beautiful woman of the Court disdains the admiration of nobles and princes for your sake ; and, while the inconstancy of your disposition causes you to become attached to another, you expect the Señora to be contented with a heart divided amongst a thousand. Trust me,

unless I greatly mistake her character, she will not bestow a second thought upon your Majesty, when she learns this new inclination. Alas, Sire ! how often it grieves me to reflect, that the best of princes is not exempt from the faults and weaknesses which disgrace his inferiors !’

“ ‘ Were I perfect, Rosny,’ said the King, laughing, ‘ thou wouldst lose thy office of censor ; and, *de par Dieu*, when I pass my days and nights in toil and danger ; when the greatest portion of my time is spent amid scenes of peril and horror, and in enduring toils and hardships such as the meanest soldier often shrinks from,—why should I be denied all that can render such a life supportable ? Methinks Heaven, in its infinite mercy, pardons the weaknesses and errors of those who possess redeeming qualities to outweigh them.—But, to return to our first subject : you shall accompany me to the Castle of Frontenaye ; we shall travel as private gentlemen, with only two followers ; you will thus see Mademoiselle de Frontenaye, and be enabled

to judge for yourself. By Heaven's light ! she would add lustre to a throne ; her birth is noble ; and, through her mother's side, she is connected with the Navarre family.'

“ ‘ Sire,’ said Rosny, ‘ I pray you to accede to the conditions which I am going to propose : if your Majesty orders it, I will accompany you to Frontenaye now ; but, if my advice has any weight with your Majesty, I would recommend that your visit thither be deferred for a year from this date. I will then make the journey with good-will, and in any disguise you may consider most suitable. Your divorce will be an affair requiring much time and deliberation. In a year it will be time to consider the subject of another marriage, and I shall be happy to have the honour of assisting your Majesty therein, with my poor counsel.’

“ ‘ I know your motives for this delay, my friend,’ said the King ; ‘ but, in order to show you that I shall never disdain the counsels of an upright minister, I give you the promise

you desire. And now, to rest; for, in truth, I feel weary and inclined to sleep.'

"I heard the King and his Minister depart. Daylight was breaking. I returned softly to my apartment, in a state of mind nearly approaching to insanity. A phial of laudanum stood on the table. Do not shrink from me, when I confess that I put it to my lips — my head was wandering — my brain burning. That hour would have closed my mortal existence, when a strain of music, so sad, so solemn, passed below my windows, that I remained lost in admiration — my fatal purpose for a moment suspended. A coffin, covered with garlands of white roses, was borne slowly along. The face of the deceased was uncovered, and its pale beauty was inexpressibly affecting. Those who sang were women, sisters of a charitable order; 'Peace be to the soul of our sister!' they sang — 'Her life was a scene of trouble; but her death was happy. She is now with her God. The Holy Virgin smiles upon her. May our

latter days be like her's ! Blessed be they who die in the Lord.' The phial fell from my hand, and I burst into tears.

" ' Blessed are they who die in the Lord !' These words seemed like a voice from Heaven, sent in mercy to the guilty wretch who would have dared, uncalled, to rush before the holy tribunal. I threw on my veil—I descended the staircase, and mingled with the procession.

" ' Who was your sister ? Of what did she die ? So young, so much regretted ?' said I to an aged Nun, who seemed overwhelmed with sorrow.

" ' She died of a decline,' said the Nun, ' brought on by grief. She was deceived by a false marriage *with a Spanish nobleman*. She returned to her father upon discovering the deception. He died, recommending her to the care of his sister, our Lady Abbess.'

" ' Her name ?' said I eagerly.

" ' Sister Adelaide,' replied the Nun.

" ' Oh Heaven !' I exclaimed, ' poor Ade-

laide ! so innocent—so lovely—so deserving of a happier fate !’

“ ‘ You knew her then ?’ said the Nun inquiringly. ‘ Your countenance, your dress are foreign. Can it be that you know any thing of the widow of the Spaniard who caused her death ?’

“ ‘ I am she,’ replied I.

“ ‘ Then,’ said the Nun, ‘ our Lady Abbess has a letter for you, written by sister Adelaide, three days before her death.—Alas ! Señora, you look pale and wretched — as unhappy as our poor sister, and less calm.’

“ ‘ She was innocent,’ I exclaimed ; ‘ can calmness be expected from guilt ?’

“ The Nun regarded me with an air of compassion. When the ceremony was concluded, when I had taken my last look of the mortal remains of poor Adelaide, I accompanied the Nuns to their convent, in order to receive her letter.

“ I was shown into the parlour of the Abbess. How I envied the calm dignity of her

countenance, upon which reigned no trace of human passion. The repose of a religious mind, whose trust is in God, whose peace is not of this world, was legible in the whole expression of her features. An appearance of simple quiet pervaded her small apartment. A crucifix, a few books, a table, and a bench, formed its contents. At that moment I internally vowed to retire into a convent.

“ The letter of Adelaide was short, and written in a feeble hand :—

“ ‘ My sister !’ she wrote, ‘ I have not written to you as I promised, when we parted beyond the Pyrenees, because I was too weak in mind and in body. But the hand of Death is on me, and I would thank you before I die.—To you I owe a life of innocence. How can I repay the debt ?

“ ‘ Señora, you are not happy, you cannot be ; you live in the world, but you were not made for it. If you would have true peace, retire from it. Believe me, religion alone can fill up the void of a desolate heart. They tell me you

are in Paris, lady of honour to the Dowager-Queen. I would ask to see you, but I fear to awaken recollections nearly dead. As one who has passed through a gloomy forest, and hails with joy the cheerful light which shining through the foliage shows him that his toilsome journey is drawing to a close; so do I rejoice at the cheering prospect of leaving this dull and chilling world for the bright land of promise, whose sunny fields are opening on my view. If the last blessing of one who esteems and loves you be not without some value in your eyes, I pronounce it fervently sincere. May your life be peaceable!—above all, may it be innocent! and though grief may oppress you for a while, the hand of Heaven——’

“ ‘She fainted from weakness,’ said the Abbess, ‘at this period of her letter; she was never *able to write more*: her death was tranquil as that of a child.’

“ I could hear no more—I kissed the hand of the Lady Abbess in silence, and left the convent.

“ A fête was given the next day at the

Louvre. I was requested to appear as Terpsichore ! In a kind of delirium I dressed myself for it. There was no medium ; I had to choose between the extreme of gaiety, or giving way to despair. I rouged my face, covered my hair with flowers, put on a fantastic robe, and affected the highest spirits. I talked and laughed with every one, without appearing to notice the King of Navarre. I observed that he appeared vexed and annoyed by this, and I determined to prove to him that he possessed no power over my heart. Pretending the most extravagant gaiety, I delighted the assembly. Your cousin, the Duchess of Montbazon, was the only one who regarded me with eyes of compassion. When I retired to rest, and washed off my rouge and divested myself of my ornaments, I viewed myself in the mirror with horror. However, this attempt had succeeded so well, that I determined to remain at Court until I had convinced King Henry that he had no power over my heart, and that I scorned his pity.

“ I continued a year in this state of slavery, my health gradually undermining, and my spirit sinking. There *were* times, when methought my brain was beginning to turn!—oh, may God avert this last of miseries from me! Any thing but that, O merciful Heaven!

“ All at once, King Henry and Rosny left Paris, and I could not doubt whither. Without forming any decided plan, distracted between love and jealousy, I determined to follow them. I requested leave of absence from Court, under pretence of visiting my convent. When I had travelled a certain distance, I dismissed my servants and horses, and taking with me but a Spanish girl, who was entirely devoted to me, I disguised myself as a gipsy; discoloured my face, as I had learnt to do from Zitana; and, upon arriving in Provence, took up my residence in a small deserted hut on the banks of the Durance. You know the rest—you know how I watched your footsteps, day and night; but could you know or imagine the pang of maddening jealousy which I endured when, concealed by the shadow

of a spreading tree, I first beheld you walking beside the King of Navarre—you would pity, while you condemned me. From that hour, hope, which, unknown to myself, had never totally forsaken me, abandoned me for ever. I followed you at a distance. I heard the admonition of the Abbot. I sent you my picture, which I had found neglected and taken from its setting, in King Henry's cabinet, after his departure; I procured these beautiful flowers, and bribed a peasant child to throw them at your feet on your return. I sang the Spanish air which astonished you as you sat with King Henry under the orange-tree. I heard his declaration of a never-dying attachment. My senses had nearly forsaken me. The King left the castle. Having heard his intention of doing so, I had set off before daybreak, and stopped him on his journey in my character of fortune-teller; he did not recognize me. How could he imagine that she whom he had left in the midst of refined pleasure, admired, distinguished, and seemingly happy, could be wandering through

Provence, in the disguise of a gipsy, nearly distracted, and sunk in the depths of despair !

“ I returned to Paris, my mind a miserable chaos, my feelings a mixture of jealousy, and revenge, and sorrow. You arrived, and your appearance produced an immediate revolution in my feelings. When I beheld you enter the splendid apartments of the Louvre, leaning on the arm of the Duchess, advancing timidly through the crowd of painted beauties and perfumed courtiers, you, so young, so innocent, and unpretending, entering, in the guileless simplicity of a young heart, a hardened and corrupted world,—I was at once disarmed ; I felt that, had I been worthy, I would have been your friend ; as it was, I determined to be your warning,—to save you, if possible, from the surrounding dangers ; to step forward, if necessary, to snatch you from the flower-covered pit which would be opened upon your path. But there is little cause to fear for one who is guided by the steady principles of religion. Human morality, weighed against human passions, is but as dust

in the balance.—This day I retire to my convent ; after the necessary interval has elapsed, I take the veil.—Gertrude, will you grant me a favour ?”

“ Name it,” said Gertrude.

“ Promise that, before I pronounce my vows, you will come to my convent, and will pass one day with me ; it shall be the last on which I would discourse of worldly matters.”

“ I promise it,” said Gertrude.

“ And that you do not hate, do not utterly despise me ; at least, that you feel for me the pity which angels are said to feel for fallen man.”

“ Alas ! Preciosa,” said Gertrude, “ is it for me to condemn you ? Is it for one weak mortal to pass judgment upon a fellow-sinner ? I pity you, Heaven knows how fervently, and I thank you sincerely. For my sake, you have made a painful confession of what would otherwise have remained unknown for ever. Your last worldly action has been a difficult sacrifice to virtue.”

“Wonderful are the ways of Providence,” said Preciosa. “From my rival,—from one to whom I vowed a never-dying hatred, I receive the first words of consolation which have been poured upon this desolate heart for many a sad and sorrowful day.”

“Do not call me your rival,” said Gertrude. “I have been weak, perhaps even sinfully so; but it is past. If you will, I shall accompany you to your convent, and, along with you, fly from this pestilential atmosphere.”

“Now, may Heaven reward you for these words,” said Preciosa; “but I will not take advantage of your generosity. No, Gertrude, guilt is discovered, even in this world, sooner or later. It shall never be said that you were the friend and companion of one whom the virtuous have a right to despise. When I am received under the holy shelter of a convent, when I bid an eternal adieu to the world, then only would I entreat your presence. And now, Gertrude, let us speak of yourself: should King Henry persist in his resolution of offering his hand,

after the divorce has taken place, does the prospect appear dazzling in your eyes?"

"Consult yourself, Señora," said Gertrude. "You, who know the nature of true love, and of what it is capable, say, could a heart not wholly occupied by ambition accede to a proposal so injurious to the interests of King Henry?"

"Were there no other reason for refusing so bright a destiny but the one you have mentioned," said Preciosa, "believe me, I would scarcely consider it a sufficient motive. Similar alliances as unequal have been made, and without any fatal results. The marriage of the present King with Louise de Vandemont is a striking instance of this truth. It is not for Henry of Navarre that I would fear;—it is for yourself. Could he descend to the rank of a single gentleman, and offer you his hand, such is his character, that your life with him would be wretched. How could you endure to see one to whom you were entirely devoted, abandon you for the first artful coquette whom chance might throw in his way?—yet such would

be your fate. However, Gertrude, I confess that I am incompetent to advise you on this subject. I speak after my own feelings. I have found the vanity of rank, and riches, and power; the worthlessness of all human distinctions. When I consider your marriage with Henry of Navarre, I throw these worldly advantages out of the scale. Yet would to God I might have the consolation of beholding you happy before I die! a secret foreboding tells me that I cannot live long; I ask but time to make my peace with Heaven; and then, with how little regret shall I close my eyes upon the world, as one who after a day of toil and labour gladly seeks the couch where he may repose in peace."

"Your parents!" said Gertrude. "Alas! Preciosa, remember them."

"Gertrude!" said Preciosa, in a hollow voice, "I have received my father's curse! The confessor of Zulema came to Court: on his return to Spain, he informed my father of my guilt; the Marquis wrote me a few lines, every

one of which is impressed upon my heart in characters of living fire. Yes—he cursed me—he named me a disgrace to my family; and he desired never more to hear my name! thus cast off, abandoned, can I wish to live?”

As Preciosa spoke these words, a loud tumult was heard below the windows—“To the gallows, miscreant! to the gallows!” shouted the populace.

“Marchioness of Villabella,” cried a stentorian voice; “in the name of former years, I beseech you, come to your window.”

Preciosa rose and crossed the room with a pale and terrified countenance.

“Open the casement,” cried the astrologer, for he it was who spoke. Mechanically Preciosa obeyed.

“I will speak to you in Spanish,” said Lucan, “that these blood-hounds may not comprehend my words. I die for your sake; it was I who murdered your unworthy husband, the Marquis Villabella. I am weary of my life, and have confessed my crime; they drag me to

execution ; yet I shall not die by the hand of the hangman. My father predicted my fate ! Say that you forgive me."

Preciosa had no power to reply ; she stood as if entranced with horror. Lucan burst into a wild convulsive laugh.

"Behold my reward !" cried he ; " I have lived for her, I die for her, and she recoils from me as from the venomous adder, the loathsome and disgusting reptile !"

"Oh, make your peace with Heaven, unhappy man !" cried Preciosa, at last breaking silence ; " and I will pray for your soul."

With the rapidity of lightning, the astrologer drew from his belt a glittering poniard, and plunged it into his heart. A groan burst from the assembled crowd ; Lucan fell and expired without a struggle. A piercing shriek from Preciosa brought the Queen-Mother into the apartment, followed by Madame de Sauves, like one startled from slumber. Preciosa lay the image of death ; and Gertrude, her face as pale, her countenance expressive of horror, hung over

her. The Queen stood with an inquiring air ; Gertrude pointed to the window, but could not speak.

“ A man murdered !” cried the Queen hastily. “ The astrologer ! by all the Saints in Heaven !”

“ How unfortunate !” said Madame de Sauves, yawning ; “ when your Majesty wished to consult him again.”

“ I !” said the Queen angrily. “ You are a fool, my dear Madam, and should be more discreet than to accuse me of superstition.”

“ Pardon me, Madam,” said the terrified Lady of Honour ; “ I merely meant as a relaxation from the affairs of state.”

“ Say no more,” said the Queen. “ And you, ye silly maidens, what make ye from your couches at this late hour ? A love-tale, I warrant me ; or a wager, perchance, to see whose complexion best stands the test of the rising sun ?—What, ho ! Fouchu—Ambrose—Are the

lazy knaves asleep, that no one answers? Here — see that this matter be inquired into.”

“ So please you, Madam,” said Gertrude faintly, “ the unfortunate man killed himself : we witnessed it even now.”

“ He was mad,” said the Queen quietly. “ A slight matter blanches your cheeks, my maidens.”

“ We lack experience, Madam,” said Preciosa (who had gradually recovered since the Queen’s entry) in a tone of indignation.

The Queen’s features became actually distorted with anger — she muttered between her teeth ; and then, with a violent effort, became frightfully calm.

“ Good night, children !” said she, with a smile ; “ we prescribe rest after the fatigues of the ballet. — Come, Madam, pity that with that becoming head-gear, there is no one to admire you ;” and, taking the arm of Madame de Sauves, her Majesty left the room.

“ Preciosa !” said Gertrude ; “ after all that I

have seen and heard this night, a longer abode at Court would be odious to me. I will accompany you to your convent. Nothing can change my resolution. I only would to Heaven that our religion also permitted some holy asylum for the unfortunate."

Preciosa paused for a moment—"Rest for a few hours," said she, "before you come to a final determination. Every one will be late of awaking. My mind is confused after these horrors. I can speak no more upon any subject—Adieu! Over again, before I leave your apartment, swear that you do not despise me!"

The only reply of Gertrude was to throw herself into the arms of the Marchioness.

"Heaven be your guide and protection!" said Preciosa solemnly; "you will never repent having poured balm into a wounded heart."

An hour after, all was still in the palace of the Louvre. All was still; but all were not tranquil. In one chamber lay Queen Catherine de Medicis, canopied in velvet, and sunk in down; yet her heart was a furnace, her brain was

racked with a thousand torturing fears. In her cabinet lay Madame de Sauves, her mind, in miniature, bearing a strong resemblance to that of her royal mistress. Her intrigues more petty, her genius more limited—they bore the affinity to each other that the dexterous pickpocket does to the highway-robber. The Princess Catherine of Navarre slept, but not soundly. She dreamt that she was practising the steps of a new ballet, with Monsieur de Soissons. King Henry, the Majesty of France, was still awake. Lamps were burning brightly in his chamber; his *Mignons*, half asleep, were stretched on couches in the antechamber. But no work of genius, destined to descend to ages yet unborn, causes him to consume the midnight oil:—he is starching a ruff for Queen Louisa! The young Baron de Rosny lay anxiously meditating many a lofty thought, and considering the state of affairs at that moment, especially as they regarded the King of Navarre.

Preciosa, with a light step, followed by her Spanish attendants, passed by the several apart-

ments ; and though few of the inmates excited her regrets, she could not help sighing, as she passed by, at the thought that she would never again behold those with whom she had so long resided in intimacy. She approached the room of Gertrude with a light step. Sunk in the deepest sleep, Gertrude awakened not.

“ Poor child !” said Preciosa, “ ’tis the slumber of innocence ;” and, laying on the table a letter to her direction, she softly left the room. As she passed through the great hall of the Louvre, the lamps, half extinguished, mingled their sickly glare with the light of morning. King Henry of Navarre had thrown himself upon a couch after the ballet was over, and lay in a deep yet troubled slumber. A lamp, a cup of wine, and a volume of Ronsard, were on the marble table before him. His face was flushed, and he spoke through his sleep. Preciosa started on perceiving him ; she covered her face with her hands, and passed rapidly by. A thought struck her, and she returned as hastily. A ring was on her finger ; in former days

she received it from King Henry. She drew it off and approached him. "'Tis the last remaining link," thought she to herself, "and it must be broken." She gently put the ring upon his finger. "When he wakens, he will see the ring, and he must think of me," said she to herself. She looked at him once more. She thought of his virtues—his generosity—his courage—his goodness of heart displayed in a thousand instances—his patriotism—and the dangers that surrounded him. "He has broken my heart," thought she, "but will never know it;" and, raising to Heaven her beautiful eyes, so heavy, so melancholy, she prayed for his happiness, his welfare.

"Be his shield, O gracious Heaven!" she softly whispered; "be a lamp to his feet—a lantern unto his paths: guard him in the hour of battle—defend him from the steel of the assassin—encircle him as with an armed host."

She drew her veil more closely over her face, descended the staircase, and mounted her horse. She fixed her eyes upon the Louvre till it had

diminished to a speck. "Thus," thought she, "must the whole world, with all its vanities, its pleasures, its importance, appear to the Almighty Creator—a speck—a nothing—an atom in the immensity of space. And for the miserable pleasures of this paltry world I have lost my hopes of Heaven!"

CHAPTER VII.

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,

'Tis woman's whole existence ; man may range

The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,

Sword, gown, gain glory, offer in exchange

Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,—

And few there are whom these cannot estrange.

BYRON.

THE sun, shining brightly into Gertrude's room, awakened her, and she rose and dressed hastily, her mind retaining a confused recollection of her last night's adventures. She looked from the window. The dead body of the unfortunate Lucan had been removed ; but a long stream of blood attested the reality of the event. The note which Preciosa had laid upon the table caught her eye:—

“Forgive me, dearest Gertrude,” she wrote, “if, by departing without bidding you adieu, I adopt the only method by which I can avoid taking advantage of your generous offer. I go with a breaking heart, and thoughts yet unweaned from this wretched world. I leave but two behind me in whose fate I am interested,—Henry of Navarre and yourself. For him I fear not: first, because he is a man; and secondly, because he is of a happy disposition, and one in whom sorrow passes lightly over, leaving but a gentle and easily-effaced impression. I leave him in the midst of pleasures; and if dangers lurk beneath them, he is a man, he can defend himself. Men are subject to die violent deaths; but they almost have it in their power to shape the destiny of their lives. My last prayer to Heaven shall be for him. Though he has disenchanted my existence, and made my life but a dreary journey to the grave; though but for him I might have lived honoured and beloved, and died respected, and in peace, yet I forgive him. Alas! does he think,

do men think, that the hearts of women are but toys to trifle with? or, haply, do they believe them formed of such hard material that they will not break? They know not—care not. It is not then of men I speak; it is not for Henry of Navarre I tremble. — Gertrude, it is for you. You are a woman,—therefore destined from your cradle to misery. You have a heart, — therefore you will feel that misery. Yes — from the cradle to the grave, woman's life is but a chain of sorrow; and if some bright flowers embellish her early days—if some vivid joys are thrown around her path in the morning of life, how bitterly do they contrast with her future years! How often do the sorrows of her whole existence arise from those very hours of pleasure!—brief—fleeting—dangerous. —Oh! who would grieve for the death of an infant daughter! Who would not rather rejoice that she did not grow up to be a woman—an unprotected, deserted, unpitied woman? Methinks, if any of our sex are happy, it can only arise from two causes; from a hardened heart, or an insensible one. Why are we not taught this by

our instructors? Why are we not told that we are victims, and given time to prepare for our fate? Why are we led into the world as goddesses, decked with flowers, radiant with the smiles of anticipated joys, surrounded by flattering words? It is a cruel deception: we are forced to marry those we hate, and thus we are chained to sorrow through life; or, worse than this, we marry those we love, and in a short period we are repaid by ingratitude and neglect. We lead a life of resignation, and try to appear contented, and pass our lives like statues, with hearts of stone, or of brass; or we catch at a passing pleasure, and try to deaden our grief, and we are defamed, insulted, vilified; or we sin, and our portion is — remorse, desertion, and despair.

“As I write, my grief, which I thought at its height, increases. I know not why I write; but that sorrow, like a river, long pent up, overflows its banks, and gushes forth in torrents. I enter the cloister — I take the veil: but what a heart will beat beneath the habit of

the Nun ! How can I pronounce my vows, till my mind is weaned from the things of time ? Yet the society of the holy-minded may produce holy thoughts.

“ Lost as I am, I venture to advise you : for the present, remain where you are ; see the King of Navarre as usual. When you look on him, gay and contented, think of me. Endeavour to accustom yourself to his presence. Among those who have offered you their hearts and fortunes, there are many worthy of you. But fate will have its way ; and if you are destined to be unhappy, you can but try to meet the blow as nobly as you can ; and endeavour at least to retain the consolation of reflecting that you are not the cause of your own misfortunes. Adieu ! the streets are beginning to give signs of life. A happy artizan passes by, singing to his morning work. A little ragged boy gazes on the Louvre with envying eyes, thinking perchance that sorrow may not enter those walls. For the last time, I see the sun shining upon Paris. Scenes of short-lived pleasure, and of

ever-during woe, adieu ! All are at rest within the palace. When they waken, there is but one who will inquire for me. Oh ! that there were some short yet sinless method of freeing oneself from the burden of life ! But, for a guilty soul to venture, unbidden, into His presence, whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity ! — No ! fear not, Gertrude. I trust to Heaven's mercy alone for a speedy deliverance. Adieu, adieu."

With slow steps and a heavy heart, Gertrude took her usual station near Madame Catherine. She was rallied on her melancholy appearance. The Baroness distorted her features into what she intended for a significant smile. The King of Navarre looked at her anxiously. Her whole thoughts filled with the story of the unfortunate Preciosa ; she turned from him with a feeling almost approaching to contempt. A page entered the room, and announced that a poor family who had travelled all the way from Bearne, insisted upon seeing the King of Navarre.

“ Let them be shown to my cabinet,” said Henry good-humouredly.

“ I pray your Majesty, let them be shown hither,” said Madame de Sauves, in hopes of some amusement.

“ Let us see him !” said voices in the ante-chamber ; and at the same moment an aged peasant, with grey hair, entered the room, supported by a little girl of twelve years old ; a young peasant woman, with an infant in her arms, and four young children, followed ; and, without noticing either the splendid blaze of beauty, or the brilliancy of the apartment, either of which might have dazzled an experienced eye, they made their way up to the King of Navarre, and threw themselves at his feet.

“ Our Sovereign ! our benefactor !” exclaimed the old man.

“ Our tutelary angel !” said the woman, while the children clasped their little hands, and the eldest girl repeated,

“ Our benefactor ! God bless him !”

They all spoke in *patois*. The company called for an explanation. King Henry briefly stated that they were grateful to him for having rendered them assistance when the overflowing of the Adour had deprived them of the means of subsistence. Rosny looked on with tears in his eyes; but every one might see they were tears of satisfaction and pride. Tears overflowed the eyes of Gertrude; but she was unhappy, and wept from various feelings.

“Thus it is,” thought she, “that I am forced to see his superiority over all others,—even when I have most cause to blame his conduct: or is it true, what Preciosa once said to me, ‘For every other crime a man is blamed or punished; if he steals, or murders, or maltreats his fellow, or even if he speaks a light word of one of his own sex, his life is often the sacrifice: but woman is an exception; towards her he may behave like a villain with impunity; and his success in having deceived and then scorned her, is often the principal cause of the estimation in which the world holds him.’”

Meanwhile, the first burst of their gratitude over, the poor Bearnois peasants began to be sensible of the grandeur of the scene before them, and looked down upon their *sabots*, and then up at the Queen's diamonds, with an air of frightened rusticity. The beauty of Gertrude struck the peasant woman.

"If that be your Majesty's Queen," said she, "the Virgin bless her! She is worthy of you."

Gertrude, who observed that they spoke of her, blushed deeply.

"God's pity!" said D'Aubigné. "Under your favour, gentle ladies, this Gascon *patois* is a vantage-ground for his Majesty of Navarre. Who knows what discourse he may hold of us, under this disguise, to yonder good dame of Bearne?"

"Rosny," whispered King Henry, "I swear to you, by this right hand, I feel greater pleasure in having relieved this poor family, whom I lately saw so wretched, than when I rode home victorious after the battle of Moncontour."

“ May it ever be so, Sire !” said Rosny earnestly. “ And oh ! that in certain other matters your Majesty would act a part as well suited to win you the affections of the people, whom one day (God save the present Majesty !) you may reign over.”

“ Allow me,” said Madame de Montbazon, “ to make a proposal to your Majesties. These poor people, it seems, have lost all they possessed by the overflowing of the river, which destroyed their grain, and reduced them to the utmost poverty. His Majesty of Navarre was informed of this, went to Bearne, inquired personally into the extent of the calamity, and assisted them with a generosity for which his own heart, and the affection of his subjects, are a sufficient reward. But shall we, ladies, leave all the merit to him ? Look at our dresses. Look at the splendour which reigns in this apartment. Madame Catherine, one diamond from that *aigrette* would purchase wherewith to support one of these poor industrious families

for a year. Let us make a subscription. I will be *quêteuse*."

"I give ten louis," said Queen Louisa. "Let those who will, follow my example."

Some from vanity, and some from a momentary pity, imitated the Queen; and a large subscription was collected. The peasants were dismissed, thinking, as they took their departure, that they left a company of angels.

"Beshrew me," said Monsieur Quélus, one of the King's favourites, "if the Duchess have not chosen a most peremptory beautiful dress, and of excellent device, for the office of *quêteuse*. By the mass! that Lyons silk kirtle, and the pink ribbons wherewith her *coëffure* is arranged, are in excellent keeping."

"True," said D'Aubigné. "No one can dispute her Grace's taste in dress. Pity only that it should be employed on no higher subject!"

"I hear what you say, M. D'Aubigné," said the Duchess; "but you are quite wrong.

My taste could not be employed upon any thing more lofty."

"What, Madam," said D'Aubigné, "might not such a taste be carried farther, and render you illustrious in architecture, in painting—"

"Hold, Sir," said the Duchess; "there cannot be, according to me, a more noble employment than that of ornamenting the human form—of showing our gratitude for the beauty or grace wherewith Nature may have been pleased to endow us, by increasing it to the best of our power. Dressing oneself with taste is an innocent and elegant recreation, and superior to every other art and science you can mention. As for painting,—is any portrait upon earth equal in beauty to the profile of Lady de Frontenaye, as she converses just now with Monsieur de Grammont? And is not her beauty greatly increased by the perfect taste with which she is dressed? Had she painted upon canvass for a year, would she have produced any thing half as lovely?"

"Well, beshrew me," said D'Aubigné, "if

your Grace does not make the most unblushing defence of coquetry I ever heard. I only would, however, that all ladies possessed a similar degree of candour, and frankly owned that they love nothing on earth so well as making their *toilette*."

Gertrude had observed that several times Monsieur de Rosny had regarded her with an anxious and earnest expression, and she was surprised at length by his coming close to where she sat; and still more when, under pretence of examining her embroidery, he dropped a small billet upon her lap. Anxious to learn what could induce the grave and respectable Monsieur de Rosny to act with this degree of mystery, Gertrude soon after rose, and left the room to examine the contents of the note. It was as follows:—

"YOU will, I trust, believe me, Madam, when I assure you that nothing but an urgent motive could induce me to proffer the request which I now make, that you will meet me in private, at

any hour or place you may deem suitable. I am, Madam, with respect and esteem,

Your humble servant,

DE ROSNY."

Gertrude trembled as she read this note: she foresaw that there was but one subject upon which the Baron de Rosny could be desirous of conversing with her. She recollected the conversation which Preciosa had heard, in which the Baron had consented, should King Henry continue constant in his resolution for one year, to consider the subject of his marriage with her. It was then, with a mixture of hope and fear, that she answered thus:—

"Certain that I may place implicit confidence in the well-known character of the Baron de Rosny, I do not hesitate in saying that I shall be in the picture-gallery at eleven o'clock this evening."

Gertrude and M. de Rosny entered the gallery by different doors, at the same moment. Different motives had made them both antici-

pate the hour. Monsieur de Rosny walked up and down for a few moments, and appeared embarrassed as to how he might best disclose the nature of the subject on which he came to converse.

“I have come according to your desire, Monsieur de Rosny,” said the Countess, first breaking silence.

“You are very kind, Madam!” said Rosny, pausing for a moment. “You know my attachment, Madam, to the King of Navarre, and that I am bound to his service for life. This alone can excuse what I now come to communicate to you.”

“Speak on, Sir,” said Gertrude faintly.

“I am not a man of many words, Madam,” said Rosny; “yet, did I not know your superiority over all the other ladies of the Court, I would not have ventured to take this step; and as it is, I fear, however, that when I have disclosed the object of my mission, I shall hardly stand excused in your eyes.—In sooth,” added he, almost speaking to himself, “few women there be who

would make so great a sacrifice. I accompanied his Majesty to Frontenaye. You are then aware, Madam, that I am well informed of the deception which he practised upon you; but, as Heaven is my witness, I was no party in it. Since that time, you have occupied his whole thoughts.—How he may win your favour—how he may gain your affections, is his study.”

“Monsieur de Rosny,” said Gertrude, “you did well to premise, ere you commenced, that you had an offensive communication to make. Is the existence of Marguerite of Navarre unknown to you, or am I to suppose that you hold a light opinion of me, that you thus discourse of her husband’s insulting admiration for me?”

“Alas! Madam,” said Rosny, “neither of these surmises is founded. His intentions towards you are assuredly those of a man of honour and of a gentleman. The King desires a divorce from Marguerite of Valois, and proposes to offer you a share of his throne.”

“And is it by his Majesty’s desire, Monsieur de Rosny, that you have sought this interview?”

“On the contrary, Madam, he knew not of my intention. He communicated to me the nature of his attachment towards you, and honoured me so far as to request my advice; but after the fashion of those who consult others, when their mind is made up as to the conduct they intend to pursue. I come then, as the last resource, to throw myself upon your mercy, to implore you to save him from himself, generously to sacrifice the splendid prospect which is held out to you, for the interests of France, and of its future sovereign. If the divorce he so greatly desires does take place,—and it may be years before it can be consummated, to say nothing also of the probability that the Princess herself, without whose consent no step towards it can be taken, will never grant it to a measure so degrading to one of her high family;—but, if it should be at length brought about, how necessary is it that an alliance should be formed by his Majesty with

some foreign Princess, through whose means his interests may be strengthened ! Were you of royal birth, God is my witness with what pleasure I would behold you seated upon a throne which you would adorn. As it is, so far from being elevated, it would be a degradation to you. The family of the King, incensed against you, would treat you with every indignity which could be most galling to a heart like yours. The people, who would consider their sovereign mis-allied, would load your name with execration : the King of Navarre himself would learn, in a few years, bitterly to repent the hour when, stepping from his station, he followed the dictates of passion, and forgot the necessity which a virtuous prince should always remember ever exists, for consulting his country's welfare before all private feelings."

" I beseech you, Monsieur de Rosny," said Gertrude, trying to speak with composure, " say no more. I will not bring misfortune on King Henry, nor accept of a rank which is unsuitable to me."

“Have you strength, Lady, to keep this resolution?” said the Baron.

“I have given you no cause, Sir, to doubt my sincerity.”

“Not your sincerity,” said the Baron—“but, by the Saints! it is almost expecting too great a sacrifice from any woman, even the most strong-minded.”

“Behold here, M. de Rosny,” said Gertrude, “is the picture of Jeanne D’Albret, Queen of Navarre:—by the memory of that virtuous Queen and tender mother, I solemnly swear to keep the promise which I have made to you.”

“Words fail me!” said Rosny, with tears in his eyes, “to express my admiration. God wot, there be many who find a niche in the page of history less deserving of it than one of whom this heroic trait shall haply never be recorded. I thank Heaven! my heart did justice to your virtues, when it prompted me to take this step. And now I have yet another favour to ask.”

“It is granted ere asked,” said Gertrude, with a wretched attempt at a smile; “you can

have little doubt, Sir, that it can scarcely fail to appear trifling to me now."

"I beseech you to conceal from King Henry that I have informed you of his intention, or have spoken to you on the subject."

"I promise," said Gertrude. "Adieu, M. de Rosny."

"Farewell ! Lady de Frontenaye," said Rosny, respectfully kissing her hand. "May Heaven be your support, and an approving conscience your reward !"

Gertrude returned to her chamber, and gave vent to her feelings in a burst of anguish, which the presence of M. de Rosny alone had prevented her from indulging in.

CHAPTER VIII.

And is he gone? On sudden solitude
How oft that fearful question will intrude!
'Twas but an instant past, and here he stood!
And now——

BYRON.

GERTRUDE continued to reside at the Court of France but the brilliant gaiety which had, at first, charmed her, had now lost all its interest in her eyes: she was indifferent to all the political changes that took place, except in so far as they affected the King of Navarre. She listened with fearful curiosity to the account of a siege in which he had performed prodigies of valour. Like a moving automaton, she followed in the train of royalty, forming part of the

beautiful pageant, admired for her beauty, and loved for the gentle sweetness of her manners.

Monsieur, the Duke of Anjou, and the King of Navarre, had, ever since the accession of King Henry the Third, been detained at the Court of Queen Catherine in a species of honourable captivity. The Queen-Mother had long endeavoured to sow disunion between these two princes, and at length succeeded by promising to each of them, separately, the lieutenant-generalship of the French army.

Wearied of the subordination in which he was held — enraged at the insolence with which he was treated by his brother's favourites, Monsieur made his escape from the Louvre, and, arriving at Dreux, soon formed for himself a numerous court and a powerful party. The Queen-Mother left Paris with her brilliant train, and pursued the fugitive from town to town, holding out the most specious offers to induce him to return — (“Like a groom,” said the Court-jester, “following a restive horse with a feed of oats”); — and at length came up to

his Royal Highness at Champigny-sur-Vede, a chateau on the borders of Touraine, belonging to the Duke of Montpensier.

The King of Navarre, finding that Queen Catherine had the intention of deceiving him as well as the Duke of Anjou, and that the offer which she had made him of the command of the armies was but a snare to blind him as to her real designs, set out upon a hunting-party, escaped from his guards, passed the Seine at Poissy, reached a country-house belonging to himself, named Chateau-neuf, with only thirty followers, drew his rents, and arrived at Alençon. Here he was joined by Monsieur and the Prince of Condé. From Alençon he passed on to Tours, where he had no sooner arrived, than he publicly resumed the exercise of the Protestant religion. The Baron de Rosny accompanied him in his flight. All seemed to announce a bloody war. The three princes, after the junction of their troops, found themselves at the head of fifty thousand men, and the Queen-Mother trembled for the result.

At Court every thing was in confusion ; and Madame Catherine saw with sorrow that all fêtes were interrupted for the present ; or at least, as she observed, so ill got up, and acted with so little spirit, that they rather resembled the melancholy pomp of a funeral procession, than the gay pageantry of a ballet.

One morning, Lady de Frontenaye was sent for in haste to the cabinet of the Princess. She was informed that Monsieur de Rosny had arrived with a message from the King of Navarre, whereby he demanded permission for his sister to leave the Court of France, and requested her to join him at Tours. It is only when those we love are exposed to danger, that we learn the full extent of our attachment to them. There is a species of love so pure, having so little of selfish feeling mingled with it, that were it not for its sadness, we could almost imagine it to exist in a holier world than this. Such was the love of Gertrude for Henry of Navarre. With a throbbing heart she reflected on the uncertain chances

of war, and looked forward to the melancholy consolation of again meeting him at a moment when the hand of death was perhaps preparing to sever them for ever. She took an affectionate leave of the Duchess of Montbazon: she recommended the little Edward to her protection, who, with all the ardour of an intelligent and ambitious child, was pursuing his studies at Paris, under the guardianship of a respectable preceptor. "Thank Heaven!" thought she, "he will not be associated in my sorrows."

"Gertrude!" said the Duchess, embracing her—"a secret grief weighs upon your heart, and is gradually consuming your existence. I would not extort your confidence; but if it is possible for me to assist you, I am ready to devote myself to your service."

"I will not conceal from you," said Gertrude, "that I am unhappy; but when human power cannot alleviate our sorrows, methinks it is but a foolishness to discourse of them."

The Queen-Mother and the young Princess took leave of each other with cold ceremony; but many a sorrowful parting took place between those of less exalted rank; and many a fond heart bled in the prospect of a lengthened separation. But the principal number merely regretted the suspension of gaiety; and those ladies especially forming the train of the Princess sighed on leaving the splendid Court of France for the comparative retirement of Bearne, where it was understood the Court were to remain until a suspension of hostilities. The journey was therefore a melancholy one. Madame Catherine occupied the first carriage, with her Governess and two ladies of honour. Monsieur de Rosny rode beside the carriage in which Gertrude sat, and devoted himself to her with the most respectful attention. They arrived at length within a few leagues of Chateau-Dun. Suddenly a cloud of dust announced the approach of horsemen; and the King of Navarre, accompanied by the Prince of Condé, rode up with three hundred followers to receive his sister.

Gertrude had looked forward with fear to this meeting. She expected to see King Henry approach with a countenance expressive of fatigue and anxiety, with a care-worn and harassed appearance. It was then with surprise and pleasure that she saw him advance with a tranquil and even cheerful air; on his brow was depicted a manly confidence, and in his eyes shone a noble tranquillity, arising from the firm conviction that Heaven favoured the cause in which he was engaged.

The army of the King of Navarre was composed equally of Catholics and Huguenots; and, as he was wont to observe, he was under greater obligations to the former, because they served him from personal attachment, and from motives wholly disinterested. But this mixture of parties was unfavourable to him. Constant dissension was the inevitable consequence. The principal Protestant nobles had an invincible aversion to the Catholic leaders. The Viscount of Turenne, a staunch Huguenot, looked with a haughty air on M. de Grammont, who was of

the Catholic persuasion; while M. de Roquelaure manifested the same feeling of dislike towards M. de Lusignan.

The royal party moved on towards Chateaudun. The spirits of the fair retinue began to revive. The King talked cheerfully of the approaching warfare, and promised to rejoin the Princess at Bearne whenever a truce should be concluded.

“The character of Proserpine must now be exchanged for that of Bellona,” said he to Gertrude.

“While your Majesty,” said the Princess, “must assume the more suitable part of Mars.”

“But, for Rosny,” said the King, “I have some intention of sending him in your train to Bearne, to spend his time in inaction, but that the punishment were too gentle for his temerity. Without considering the value of his life, he has exposed himself a thousand times in petty skirmishes in the neighbourhood of Tours, to almost certain death.”

“Pardon me, Sire,” said Rosny, “I did no

more than what the meanest soldier would have considered his duty."

"Rosny," said the King gravely, "true courage is without rashness. It is not in these engagements that I desire you to risk your life. I praise your bravery; but reserve it, my friend, for a more important occasion."

"Consider," said Rosny, "the example we receive from your Majesty. Where the battle rages hottest, the white plumes are to be seen towering above all, a mark for the fury of the enemy."

Gertrude turned pale as she heard these words. Rosny observed her emotion, and hastened to change the conversation. They reached Chateau-Dun. They were met at the gates by the Duke of Anjou and his followers. The shades of night were closing in. The Princess supped with the Duke in his private cabinet. The King of Navarre approached Gertrude, and said to her in a low voice,

"These are no times for ceremony. Those who wear sword and helmet must speak as

rough soldiers ; I lack the gift of persuasion, and I pretend not to the flowery graces of eloquence ; without farther preface, I come to crave a boon :—Lady de Frontenaye, in the name of the friendship which you promised to grant me, do not refuse my petition.”

“ Name it, Sire,” said Gertrude, trying to talk cheerfully, “ you excite my curiosity ; do not keep me in suspense, I pray you.”

“ Grant me a private interview before you depart for Bearne,” said the King. “ Nay, do not refuse me, if you would not damp my ardour in the harassing scenes which I must undergo. Grant me this one request ?”

“ It may be the last,” said Gertrude, thinking aloud. As she looked up, she met the glance of the Baron de Rosny, which seemed to say, “ Remember your promise.” She returned it with one of proud security.

“ I agree to what you desire,” said she to King Henry.

“ You shall not have cause to repent your

condescension," said the King with a look of gratitude.

The next morning the Princess publicly attended the Protestant service at Parthenay, accompanied by Gertrude and the other ladies of the Huguenot persuasion. With what fervour Gertrude joined her prayers to those which were offered up for the success of the King of Navarre ! The preacher was a pious and zealous man. He anathematized the abominations of Popery, and called on the Princess where she sat, to join with her royal brother in rendering thanks to the Lord who had delivered them out of the hands of "the modern Jezebel," as he ventured to designate the Queen-Dowager, and had again permitted them the exercise of the Reformed Religion. Few were to be found in those turbulent days, who could discourse upon religious subjects with temper or moderation. While he spoke of Popery, the holy man's language was of an intemperate and wild nature, unbecoming the gravity of the pulpit ; but when

he described the simplicity of the Reformed doctrines, his language was moderate and impressive: and when he discoursed of the dangers of war, and the probability that those who had all met together that day in the house of the Lord, might never meet again below the sun, some of the ladies wept, and some grew pale and shuddered.

The day was spent in melancholy preparations for the departure of the Princess, which was to take place early the ensuing morning. Every one retired soon to rest, but Gertrude descended to the cabinet of the Princess, and awaited the arrival of King Henry. She sat in her travelling dress, for the carriages were ordered at break of day. King Henry entered hastily, and bent on one knee before her. Gertrude trembled, and her heart beat so violently that she could not speak, but bowed in silence.

“ You go to Bearne,” said the King abruptly; “ the chances of war may separate us, Heaven alone knows for how long a period! If I live, I shall return to lay my laurels at your feet. In the heat of battle, your image shall be my shield;

the remembrance of you shall hover around me, like a guardian angel. You weep, Gertrude! you weep — Alas! what feeling causes these tears?"

"I am ashamed," said Gertrude faintly, "of so unpardonable a weakness; but a secret feeling tells me that we shall never meet again."

"*Grand Dieu!*" cried the King, "and wherefore such a presentiment! when I myself have feelings founded on no prophetic skill, but on the strongest reason, that our success will be glorious, and that victory shall so crown our arms, that in a very short period the Queen-Mother will sue for peace."

"We cannot argue with such feelings," said Gertrude. "God grant to your Majesty the success which you anticipate! but there are other dangers than those of battle. We may escape the swords of ten thousand adversaries; yet an hour of sickness may lay us in the grave."

"In the name of Heaven!" said the King, "say, whither do your words tend?" He looked anxiously at Gertrude. The moon

shining full upon her features gave to them a pale and unearthly expression, and, for the first time, it struck King Henry that she was thinner and paler than when he first saw her at Frontenaye, radiant in health.

“Speak, Lady de Frontenaye!” he cried, “calm my fears. — Do you anticipate illness to yourself?”

“I speak,” said Gertrude, “of chances common to all; I am not ill, nor do I anticipate illness, and yet—my heart forebodes misfortune.”

“You can conquer Fate,” said the King, “by choosing your own destiny. One day, I shall be free. I speak not of rank, or riches, or brilliant prospects. I offer you a heart devoted to you for life. I acknowledge that I have before felt what is miscalled love; but till I knew you, I had but fancied the emotion. I acknowledge that I have a thousand faults, a thousand imperfections; but, with so high a motive constantly before me as that of finding favour in your eyes, I will conquer every evil propensity; I will mould myself to your will; I will take your

virtues as my model through life. I speak not of the throne of France, which astrologers have predicted I shall one day ascend ; it is an uncertain and visionary prospect ; but when I have served my country and restored it to peace, together we would retire to my native mountains, and in the pleasures of domestic life forget that misfortune exists beyond our happy territory. Beloved by your subjects, as was Jeanne D'Albret, but happier—oh, grant it Heaven!—far happier in your destiny, your life would be but a scene of tranquil enjoyment. Edward shall be my son, the child of my adoption.”

While the King spoke, Gertrude, leaning her head upon her hand, listened to him in sad and melancholy reverie. She thought of the happiness there might have been, had Heaven so willed it, in realizing so sweet a picture ; but when he spoke of Edward, she started as from a dream, and suddenly rising, threw herself on her knees before the King :

“ Swear to me,” she said, “ by your hopes of Heaven, by your love for me, that, happen what

may, you will take Edward under your protection — will be to him a second father — will advance him in the world, and will never forsake him.”

“ I swear it, by the Being who hears me !” cried the King, rising up ; “ but wherefore, Gertrude, this passionate emotion ? Answer me, I beseech you : — do you consent to share my destiny ?”

“ Alas !” said Gertrude, weeping bitterly, “ my answer must grieve you ; yet the days will come, in which you will thank me for having considered your interest more truly than you yourself have done. Were you at this moment free from the ties which still bind you, I could not accept your proposal.”

“ Perhaps a previous attachment ?” said the King, in an inquiring tone, with an assumed appearance of composure, yet looking as if life and death hung upon her answer.

“ No, Sire,” said Gertrude, with modest dignity — “ I owe it to your generosity to say that, till I knew you, my heart was my own. After

this confession, I could no longer endure to dwell under the same roof with you; but it is the very strength of my attachment which induces me solemnly to declare that I never will be your's. Hear me, Sire. — Those of royal birth must wed with royalty. If the law renders you free, by dissolving your present marriage, seek for some virtuous and amiable princess, an alliance with whom will at once strengthen your interests, and ensure your domestic happiness. I do not say, forget me.— No; remember me as one whose attachment to you was pure, and free from ambitious and interested motives. If I live, it shall be my greatest happiness to hear of your welfare; and if I die," said she, with a smile, "methinks my spirit will hover over you, to guard you from evil."

The King looked at Gertrude while she spoke, and saw that there was no hope. He knelt before her: he employed every argument that might induce her to alter her resolution: he proposed a private marriage; but without success.

“ I am of too low degree publicly to espouse your Majesty,” said Gertrude ; “ yet I am too proud to do so clandestinely.”

As she spoke, she almost wondered at her own firmness, and felt as though some hidden power supported her through the trying scene ; but when King Henry, who sat with his head buried in his hands, looked up, she saw that large tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. He wept, for whom she would gladly have laid down her life, — and it was for her these bitter tears were shed. When a woman weeps, we think it but a trifling circumstance ; tears seem to come naturally to her eyes, as if to increase her loveliness ; and, in a moment after, a smile will chase them away. But when a man weeps, we feel that it proceeds from the anguish of his soul, — that nothing but the bitterness of affliction could wrest the unmanly drops from his eyes. His tears seem to flow from a deeper source.

Gertrude felt that her courage had fled. Every thing was banished from her imagination but

the idea of King Henry's sorrow. She rose, and approached him:—

“If it will console you,” said she, “I solemnly swear to you a never-dying friendship. I bind myself by an oath, that since I may not be united to you, I never will give my hand to another. I will go yet farther:—I promise to remain at your court—to be your friend through life: when you are in difficulty, I will assist you with my counsel to the best of my power: when you are in adversity, I will endeavour to console you: when you are in prosperity, I will rejoice with you. Believe me, Sire, a faithful and disinterested friend is not to be rejected.”

“Angel of sweetness!” cried the King, “every word you utter but increases my sorrow, when I think of the felicity I might have enjoyed.”

As the King spoke, the trampling of horses was heard below the window: he looked, and saw a courier, breathless with haste, ride into the court-yard. King Henry left the room to

inquire into the nature of his mission. He returned hastily in a few minutes.

“Gertrude,” said he, “I must bid you adieu ! We find it necessary to set off immediately for Beaulieu. Before I depart, grant me a token of your friendship, which, while I have breath, shall never leave me — a tress of your golden hair.”

No sharp instrument was at hand. Half-smilingly, King Henry drew his sword : Gertrude bent forward her head, and shook her clustering auburn tresses over her face. With his sword, the King severed one of the shining curls. The horses in the court-yard neighed impatiently. The King kissed her hand, and mournfully bidding her adieu, hastily left the apartment. She stood where he had taken leave of her, as if rooted to the spot. She heard his voice in the court-yard. A page brought his helmet and snowy feathers. Gertrude strained her eyes as long as he was visible. Among all the princes and nobles who accompanied the troops, she could still distinguish the waving

white plume, shining far and faint in the cold moonlight. When she could see it no more, she turned away sadly, with a darkened and prophetic feeling: a thick film passed before her eyes, and she fell fainting upon a couch.

CHAPTER IX.

Woman — the field — the ocean — all that gave
Promise of gladness, peril of a grave,
In turn he tried.

BYRON.

THE Court arrived at Pau, in Bearne. During the journey, Gertrude had been sunk in a melancholy reverie. A kind of stupor seemed to have come over her senses: no smile was seen to play upon her lips: her beautiful eyes fixed upon vacancy: but when she entered the native country of King Henry, and arrived at the Castle of Coarasse, where his youth was spent, her indifference vanished, and her interest in external objects revived.

The Princess was received with every demonstration of loyalty and affection. “Here then,”

thought Gertrude, “ in the midst of these rocks and mountains, these foaming torrents and jutting precipices, King Henry received the education which, by strengthening equally his body and his mind, has rendered him so superior to all other princes.”

The castle of Pau stands upon a romantic and singular spot, at the western end of the town, upon the brow of a rock which terminates perpendicularly. Below it runs the *Gave*, a river, or rather an impetuous torrent, which rises in the Pyrenees, and empties itself into the Adour. On the other side, about two miles off, is a range of hills covered with vineyards, which produce the famous Vin de Forançon, so greatly admired; and beyond all appear the Pyrenees themselves, covering the horizon from east to west, and forming a boundary to the enchanting prospect. They arrived at the entry of the castle, which was commenced in the fifteenth century by Gaston the Fourth, Count de Foix, who married Leonora, heiress of the crown of Navarre—but was afterwards completed and enlarged by Henry

d'Albret, who held his court there. The state-room was a large and magnificent apartment, decorated with portraits chiefly of the Navarre family. At the top of the room was a full-length portrait of Jeanne d'Albret, the mother of Henry of Navarre, the protectress of the Huguenots, and the friend of Coligny, a princess of distinguished merit, high spirit, and undaunted magnanimity. She was represented in a splendid costume befitting her rank, young, yet not in the first bloom of youth. Her head-dress was a diadem of pearls; her arms were covered with rows of the same; a high ruff was round her neck, and at her waist hung a rich chain, at the end of which was a miniature-portrait. With her right-hand she touched the strings of a guitar; in her left hung an embroidered scarf. Her eyes were large and hazel, her eyebrows dark and finely arched, her features regular, and the expression of her mouth peculiarly sweet. Gertrude looked at this picture with interest, while the Princess related to her the curious circumstances connected with the birth of the King

of Navarre ; and how Jeanne D'Albret courageously complied with her father's request that she should sing him a song in the Béarnois language during the pains of her confinement.

“ When my grandfather, Henry D'Albret,” continued the Princess, “ entered her apartment, she immediately sang the old Béarnois hymn, beginning, ‘ *Notre Dame du bout du pont, aidez moi en cette heure.*’ At the conclusion of her song, Henry was born ; and the King, carrying him into his own apartment, took a singular method of fortifying his constitution, by making him swallow some drops of wine, and rubbing his lips with a root of garlick.”

Gertrude silently thought, as she looked at the Queen's portrait, of the sad termination of her life at the court of Catherine de Medicis, which threw a prophetic gloom over the nuptials of her son. The untimely death of the great seldom fails to be attributed to extraordinary causes ; and it was loudly rumoured that the Princess was poisoned by the Dowager-

Queen, who, it was said, presented her with a pair of perfumed gloves (sold by René, an Italian, one of her creatures,) impregnated with so subtle a poison, that her death was the inevitable consequence. As Madame Catherine retired to her apartment, she showed to Gertrude the chamber where her brother was born, and the tortoise-shell which served him as a cradle.

These were not the scenes in the midst of which his memory could be forgotten. The peasantry held his name in adoration. The young Princess, who was of a charitable disposition, frequently entered the cottages of these poor people, and was pleased with the heartfelt gratitude which, in their humble manner, they displayed when she spoke to them of her royal brother. A thousand anecdotes were related of his goodness and generosity,—the condescension with which he was wont to inquire into their private condition,—the unbounded beneficence with which he relieved

their wants. Here was a young peasant woman, whom he had presented with a dowry, in order to obtain the consent of a wealthy farmer to her marriage with his only son ; — there, a poor old man would relate, with tears in his eyes, that, returning home one evening, bending under the weight of a bundle of faggots, he had been relieved from his burden by the kindness of a young huntsman, whom he afterwards discovered to be his prince ; — or an old peasant woman would proudly show the horn-spoon wherewith his Majesty had condescended to partake of her humble fare of curds and cream, when, having ridden forward before his suite, and missed his way, he had entered her cottage, — “and our Prince, Heaven bless him !” the old woman would add, “said he had not a better dish at the castle ; and when his Majesty went away, he gave Jeanneton that gold chain off his neck — ay, in troth he did — and he shook hands with me too.”

Gertrude listened to all these details with

melancholy pleasure, but with a degree of interest which made her feel the full extent of the imprudence she had committed in promising to continue her residence at the Court of Navarre; yet it was in vain that the Princess, who saw that some secret grief was undermining the health of her young favourite, inquired into the cause with the utmost kindness.

The Court of Madame Catherine was gay and brilliant. The young nobility who flocked to it from all quarters, declared, that though inferior to the Court of France in magnificence, it equalled it in elegance, and surpassed it in variety. The facetious *Chicot* was one of its principal ornaments. He was a Gascon by birth, of independent fortune, a privileged jester, and the life of every society. He assisted the Princess in the arrangement of her fêtes,—he was a professed enemy to etiquette,—he gave his opinion upon every subject, with a freedom which was only forgiven on account of his wit. He was killed some years afterwards in the following cruel manner.

Having taken Henry of Lorraine, Count of Chavigny prisoner, during the siege of Rouen, he brought him into the presence of Henry the Fourth, saying—" *Tiens, voilà ce que je te donne.*" The Count, enraged at being taken prisoner by one whom he considered a mere buffoon, struck him on the head with the hilt of his sword, so violently, that he died.

It was proposed by the Princess, that a fête should be given in imitation of the "*superbe festin*" which was held by the Queen-Mother at Bayonne, on the occasion of her interview with her daughter, the Queen of Spain. In pursuance of the desire of the Princess, the whole Court appeared dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses of the different French provinces.

The shepherdesses were somewhat incongruously clad in cloth of gold, cut in the form of peasants' dresses; those of Provence danced *lavoltas* to the sound of tymbrels; those of Brittany, the *passe-pieds* and *branle-garès*; while the fair representatives of the Burgundian and

Champenoise peasantry danced to the sound of hautboys and tambourins.

The fête took place in a beautiful and solitary part of the country, about a league from Coarasse, and was terminated by a superb collation, handed about to the spectators by the distinguished performers. Tired of dancing, the Princess took the arm of Gertrude, and, dismissing her suite, wandered through the winding wood-paths, until they arrived at the foot of a chain of precipitous rocks washed by the waves of the river Adour. They sat down to rest at the entry of the wood, and admired the picturesque effect of a rustic bridge thrown across two projecting pieces of rock, and beneath which the river, forming itself into a foaming torrent, dashed violently against the precipice.

The Princess suddenly remarked, that a human figure stood upon this fragile bridge, and was carelessly looking down into the frightful chasm: "and yet, in sooth," added she, "I scarce think any human being could be so fool-hardy ;

nay, it must be a water-spirit or wood-demon, and we shall shortly see him leap into the flood.”

As the Princess spoke, it suddenly occurred to her that the place was wild and solitary, and that she and her maid of honour were imprudently separated from the rest of the company.

Just as this thought struck her, Gertrude, with a countenance expressive of fear, seized her by the hand, and, laying her finger on her lips to enjoin silence, endeavoured to draw her away from the bank where they were seated. Instead of following her, as Gertrude endeavoured by mute signs to show her was necessary, the Princess looked round on all sides to discover the cause of her alarm, and uttered a piercing shriek on perceiving a ferocious-looking bear lying asleep at the foot of a wild nut-tree, about fifty yards from where she sat.

At the sound of her cry, the bear awoke; Gertrude, courageously placing herself between the Princess and the fierce animal, besought her to fly; Madame Catherine cried loudly for

help. The report of a gun was heard; the bear fell at the same moment, within a few paces from Gertrude. The Princess sank upon the grass, fainting; Gertrude bathed her face with water from the river. A stranger, in a shooting garb, and with a gun in his hand, was seen descending from the rock, and, springing across a narrow part of the stream, respectfully approached, and, taking off his hat, saluted the Princess, who was beginning to recover. She expressed her gratitude in animated terms; and, taking the arm of the stranger, requested him to act as her escort. Gertrude walked by her side in silence.

The stranger appeared about thirty years of age; and his appearance was so strikingly distinguished, that, after the fears of the Princess were calmed, she began to feel a degree of curiosity as to his name and rank. He spoke French fluently, but with a foreign accent. His hair was black, and, according to the fashion of that day, hung in long ringlets on either side; his face was pale; his eyes large, black, and expressive; his countenance wore an

air of proud melancholy. With the freedom of high rank, the Princess questioned him as to his name and country. He was an Englishman; his name, Lord de Gray; he was a traveller for amusement, and was standing on the rustic bridge, admiring the effect of the foaming torrent, as it dashed its spray against the rock. He was descending the precipice when he heard the cry of the Princess, and, fortunately, having his gun loaded, was enabled to save her from an imminent danger.

The Princess informed the stranger of her rank, and of the cause of the fantastic dresses which she and Lady de Frontenaye wore. On the announcement of the Princess's name, Lord de Gray respectfully bent on one knee, and kissed her hand. Madame Catherine was in raptures of admiration at the intrepidity and presence of mind which Lady de Frontenaye had displayed. The stranger looked at the beautiful figure of Gertrude with admiration.

The Princess was habited as a Portevin peasant, in cloth of gold; Gertrude, with better

taste, wore the true dress of a Provençal peasant; a large hat, such as is worn by the girls of Provence, concealed her features; and the short scarlet kirtle and black boddice which she wore, and the gaiety of her fancy costume, contrasted painfully with her sad and dejected appearance. They were now met by a part of Madame Catherine's suite, and by Madame d Tignonville, who was uneasy at her protracted absence. She presented Lord de Gray as her deliverer, and invited him to the ball which was still to take place that evening.

Lord de Gray was an Englishman by birth, forming one of that numerous class who are more properly denominated citizens of the world. At the age of seven he was sent away from his father's house, and received his education in a public seminary; at the age of twelve, considering himself unjustly treated by one of the masters, he made his escape out of a window, his flight being favoured by his school-fellows, by whom he was adored; and entered the army as a simple volunteer. Personal bra-

very and family interest raised him to a distinguished rank, and before he had attained his eighteenth year, the death of his father put him in possession of a large fortune and an ancient title. These, joined to his personal advantages, ensured his success in the world. At Rome he was known by the name of "*Le beau Chevalier Anglais*." His retinue, dress, and equipages threw all others into the shade, and in two years he had expended the greatest part of a princely fortune ; not entirely in fêtes, dinners, and gambling, as he had performed many actions of such romantic generosity, that the sober-minded part of the world could hardly give credit to their truth. He had also, with scrupulous exactitude, paid his father's debts to the last farthing. So punctilious was he on points of honour, that, like the handsome Bussy D'Amboise, "he laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, if a fly but tickled his forehead." However, having run his career of folly,—having, to the indignation of his mother the Countess de Gray, fought more duels than he could conveniently keep count of ; having

been seriously attached to ladies of all countries, whether French, Italian, German or Spanish; having deserted some, and been deserted by others, he found himself, at the age of five-and-twenty, wearied of the world and its vanities, and older in spirit than many an honest man of eighty, who had never left his own fire-side. In his boyhood he had contracted a romantic friendship for a young man of high family, named Fitz-Eustace, whom he saved from drowning at the risk of his life, and who looked up to the young Lord de Gray as to a superior being. A letter which he wrote to his friend Fitz-Eustace, soon after his introduction to the Princess, may best show the true nature of his feelings.

“DEAR FITZ-EUSTACE,

“THOU hast often complained that, whilst thy letters to me are enlivened by an account of the gay splendour of the London court, mine are but dolesome and unvaried chronicles of all the barren rocks, waterfalls, dark forests, and foaming rivers, which I may chance to encounter

in my wandering life. *Blasé*, as the French expressively say, upon all matters of pleasure or gaiety, I have, for some years past, avoided the sight of all human faces with a degree of scrupulous observance, which would have probably obtained me canonization, had I been a member of some holy brotherhood. I passed through Paris without paying my *devoirs* to the brilliant court of De Medicis, ay, even though knowing that Madame de S—— was among the ladies of honour.

“On arriving at Bearne, I took up my abode at a ruined chateau, a league from Coarasse, to avoid the tiresome bustle which the arrival of the Princess of Navarre could not fail to create. You will then wonder, my friend, when I confess, that I am just returned from the royal residence, after leading off a *pavan* with ———. But listen with all due attention, whilst I relate to thee the circumstances which have perhaps changed my fate, and which have made me aware, for the first time, of the value of my existence.

“Near the ancient ruin where I had taken up my abode is a precipitous range of mountains, the view from the summit of which is so superb, that it has been for some weeks past my constant recreation to lie for hours on the top of one of these wild precipices, listening to the hoarse murmur of the water, and admiring the various effects of light and shade upon the distant hills. I was standing on a rustic bridge thrown over two of these jutting masses of rock, when I perceived two persons seat themselves on the opposite side of the river, the appearance of whom attracted my attention. One of them was habited as a girl of Portevin; but her holiday-dress, if such it was, showed a degree of magnificence at variance with her condition; for, as the sun glanced upon her figure, it seemed as though its rays lighted up a kirtle of the richest gold brocade, while her hat was composed of the same costly material; her companion was dressed like a Provençal peasant, but there was a noble dignity in her light and airy figure, which gave her the appearance of a

disguised queen : as it was, nothing could have a more magical effect than their sudden appearance in this sequestered spot.

“ Contrary to my usual apathy, I felt myself impelled forward by an irresistible impulse of curiosity, and descended the precipice to have a better view of the noble-looking peasant-girls. Suddenly, a cry from the lady of Portevin made the very mountain-echoes resound ; and I perceived, at the same moment, a villainous-looking bear advancing in their direction. Fortunately, my gun, which I sometimes carry with me as a kind of silent companion, was loaded, and I had time to shoot *Bruin* before *he* had time to make the ungallant attack which he evidently meditated.

“ Even in the midst of my fears for their safety, I had time to observe that the Provençal peasant had thrown herself in the way of the fierce animal with the most extraordinary intrepidity, and was urging her companion to fly, without having a regard for her own safety. I would scorn myself were I to sit

down quietly, and attempt to pourtray the exquisite loveliness of the countenance which I beheld, when, on crossing the river, my eyes encountered those of the peasant of Provence, who was bathing the face of the other lady, who had fainted. I might tell you that her eyes are of that heavenly blue, which can be compared to no flower, because the colour exists not in the vegetable creation,—to no gem, because the turquoise has too dead a tint to rival its swimming lustre. I have seen a passing blue cloud in the sky, which might give you a faint idea of its hue. I might describe to you the sunny clusters of her dark auburn hair, the short upper lip and pearly teeth ; but in so doing, I should but describe a beautiful human countenance. I could not pourtray the inexpressible beauty of her smile, the divine sweetness of her eyes, nor the kind of supernatural halo which seemed to surround her like a glory. I forgot to mention that her name is the Countess of Frontenaye—that she is unmarried—scarce eighteen—and the favourite maid of honour of the Princess of

Navarre, who was the splendidly-dressed peasant of Portevin. You may believe, that, after what has happened, I am in great favour with her Royal Highness; but, alas! would that I could say the same with regard to the young Countess! Some secret melancholy evidently preys upon her spirits. I could have fancied her the victim of an unhappy attachment; but after having watched her every look for some days past, with the utmost interest, I observe that she behaves to every one with the same indifference wherewith she conducts herself towards me. I endeavoured to feel offended by her behaviour, and to amuse myself with the vapid conversation of the other maids of honour, but in vain; while listening to them, my eyes were involuntarily fixed on the youthful bending figure of the Countess, as she sat embroidering by the side of Madame Catherine, answering with gentle sweetness when spoken to, and then again relapsing into silence. I have admired a thousand women in the course of my life, or, if you will, fancied myself in love with them; yet,

till this moment, I have not met one to whom I would have intrusted my domestic happiness. I fancy her in the ancient castle of my forefathers, sitting, like a beautiful vision, in the gothic chambers, illuminating their solemn dulness with her sweet presence. With her as my companion through life, methinks I could brave destiny. I could believe in the charms of a regular and well-spent life; but, alas! Fitz-Eustace, I am not worthy of her. I cannot bear this suspense; a short period must end it. Thou shalt hear from me again; meanwhile, thine as ever,

DE GRAY."

Gertrude was the last to perceive the admiration of the young English Earl. Madame Catherine was delighted to see that he gradually became more serious in his attentions towards her favourite.

"Will they not make a lovely couple, Tignonville?" said she to her governess, as she sat watching the countenance of Gertrude, whilst Lord de Gray addressed her. "It will be

charming to attach that handsome *Milord Anglais* to our person. Sooth, none but my young Countess could have achieved the miracle of thawing the heart of yonder proud Englishman, who looks as if he did us a condescension by entering our poor castle."

Meanwhile De Gray, seriously attached, for the first time in his life, continued to pay assiduous court to Gertrude; but, fearful of meeting with a refusal, made no declaration of his sentiments.

One evening, dispatches were brought to the Princess from the King of Navarre. Lord De Gray observed, with surprise, that Gertrude became of a deathly paleness, and he watched the countenance of the Princess while she read, with an air of intense anxiety.

"Peace is concluded!" cried Madame Catherine, "and on terms the most advantageous to our party. The King of Navarre has gone to La Rochelle, and, in a few days, we shall have the honour of his Majesty's company at our Court."

Gertrude had glided behind the Princess as she read ; and Lord De Gray observed that she clasped her hands, and looked up to Heaven with an expression of devout thankfulness.

“ Fool ! dullard that I was !” said the Earl in sorrowful soliloquy : “ might I not easily have guessed that she mourns an absent lover, and that her separation from him causes her indifference to all the gallants of this Court, and also accounts for the shade of melancholy where-with her countenance is overcast ?”

The Princess ordered a general illumination. The whole country round was a blaze of fireworks. Every one rejoiced in the prospect of the accession of gaiety which the arrival of the King of Navarre could not fail to produce.

Chicot alone loudly declared his opinion, that the peace would be of no duration, — that nothing but fear could have induced the Queen-Mother to conclude a treaty so advantageous to the Huguenots.

“ They are all her dupes,” said he, “ and kept in leading-strings. Like a careful nurse,

she sometimes permits Messieurs les Princes to run a few steps without her guidance; but when they go too *far*, she stretches out her hand, pulls them in, and again ties them to her apron-string."

The Princess was angry for a few moments; but consoling herself with the reflection that *Chicot* was but a fool, she quickly recovered her good-humour. But, alas! a short time convinced her that, for once, a fool had spoken wisely. Another courier arrived from La Rochelle. The Huguenots were again under arms.

The King of Navarre having demanded the accomplishment of the treaty, the Queen-Mother broke all her promises, denied having made any, and a fresh war was the inevitable consequence. The Huguenot troops laid siege to Ville Franche, a town in Perigord. The Baron de Rosny, having mounted to the assault with his colours, was overturned by the shock of the pikes and halberds into the ditch, where he remained for some time buried in mud and embarrassed by the weight of the colours,

and would have infallibly perished, but for the assistance of his valet, La Trappe. The town was given up to plunder, and the King led on his troops to fresh victories. When the dispatches from the army arrived at Bearne, crowds collected round the palace to learn tidings of their Prince.

Gertrude observed, that when the King wrote, he mentioned the intrepidity of Rosny ; but was silent with regard to the fatigues and dangers to which he himself was constantly exposed ; but, when the dispatches were written by the Baron, he spoke in enthusiastic terms of the gallantry of the young King.

“He exposes his person,” so Rosny wrote, “like the most simple soldier. Before Nérac, he drove back, almost singly, a body of cavalry. His valour and prudence go hand in hand.”

Having heard that the town of Eause had refused admission to the garrison sent thither by his orders, he desired Rosny and a body of troops to meet him in the country, dressed as

for the chase, and with their arms concealed under their hunting-coats. He arrived at the gates of the town, entered it, without meeting any obstacle, at the head of fifteen or sixteen, who followed him more closely than the rest of the troops.

“Lower the portcullis!” cried the rebels; and at the same moment this was done just as Béthune and Rosny entered the town. They thus found themselves separated from the main body. The rebels sounded the tocsin, flew to arms, and a troop of fifty soldiers surrounded them on all sides.

“Fire at the scarlet cloak and the white plumes,” cried voices from the crowd; “’tis the King of Navarre.”

With a calmness and courage which no one present that day ever ceased to remember, the King of Navarre turned round on hearing these words.—“Friends!” he cried, “companions! this is the moment wherein to display our courage and resolution; our welfare depends upon

ourselves.—What we shall this day perform,” added he, taking off his hat with a countenance the serenity of which was almost divine, “is written in Heaven. Let every one then follow me, and be guided by my example.”

As he spoke, he seized a pistol, and proudly advanced towards the rebels, who, at his approach, took flight. Three or four similar small divisions advanced, but were likewise dispersed. At length, however, the enemy assembled to the number of two hundred; the brave little troop of the King of Navarre gradually diminished in numbers, and the danger became extreme. The King retreated towards the gate of the church, and, placing his back to it, defended himself with coolness and intrepidity. With wonderful presence of mind, he desired two of his men to climb up into the steeple, and to make signs to those who had remained outside of the town, to hasten and drive in the gate. The King continued to fight valiantly. After many efforts, the soldiers burst open the gate, and, rushing against the rebels,

would have put them all to the sword, and given up the town to plunder ; when a deputation, consisting of the principal inhabitants of the city, with their consuls at their head, approached, and throwing themselves at the feet of the King, implored mercy. He leant upon his sword, hot, covered with dust, and breathless with fatigue, surrounded by his officers, who pressed round the young monarch, congratulating him upon his safety, and loudly expressing their admiration of his valour and presence of mind. A murmur arose among the troops, as the head of the deputation implored the mercy of the King.

“Cursed rebels !” cried one—“By ’r Lady, hanging were too good a death for them !”

“By Saint Denis !” cried another, “an’ I were his Majesty, the rascals should be spitted like calves :—our Prince will never be nearer his death while Heaven spares him.”

“Silence, my friends !” said the King. “Every drop of blood that is spilt in these wars oozes, methinks, like life-blood from my own heart. It is our brothers that we slay. The ground is

slippery with the blood of Frenchmen. They cry to us,—our brethren appeal to us for mercy. Let us not be deaf to the entreaties of a repentant brother. The town shall not be pillaged. Four of the ringleaders shall be executed as an example:—to the rest we grant a free pardon.”

Deafening cries of applause followed these words; and the young conqueror, leaving the town amidst the acclamations of the inhabitants, led on his troops to the siege of Maraude.

CHAPTER X.

'Tis said, with sorrow Time can cope,
But this I feel can ne'er be true ;
For by the death-blow of my hope
My Memory immortal grew.

BYRON.

WITH jealous anxiety Lord de Gray watched the countenance of Gertrude when the dispatches from the army arrived ; and as the names of the different officers who had distinguished themselves were read over, he endeavoured to discover the person in whose safety she was so much interested. Sometimes, with the same view, he talked to her of the young nobility who followed the King of Navarre ; but she discoursed of them all with the same indifference of manner, until he almost began to hope that he was mistaken in his conjectures. Having observed

that she appeared more than usually agitated during the account of the siege of *Eause*, he said to her in a tone of sarcasm—"Sooth, there be few ladies who take an interest so deep in political events, and to whom the account of battles and sieges is not a matter of small import, compared with the more enlivening details of fêtes and galliards;—unless, indeed," added he, "there be some friend or relative in whose welfare they are deeply concerned."

Gertrude blushed. "Nay, my Lord," said she, "assuredly you do us injustice so to speak; are we not of the reformed faith? And can any one professing the Protestant doctrines remain uninterested in the success of the Huguenot army at this moment?"

At length Lord de Gray, relying on the favour which the Princess condescended to show him, requested an interview with her, declared his sentiments for Gertrude, and besought her good offices in his behalf.

"No sacrifice that can be pointed out to me will be too great," said he: "though attached

to my country, I am ready to give it up for her sake."

"I rejoice to hear you so speak," said the Princess; "I would have greatly regretted a separation from Lady de Frontenaye; and my only reason for sorrow, had she accepted the hand of a foreigner, would have been the selfish one, that I should have been deprived of her society."

"Your Royal Highness condescends then," said De Gray, "to favour my suit?"

"Yes, truly," said the Princess; "the idea likes me well; there is no one to whom I would more gladly see her united. Methinks the English are a noble and a wise people, proud and reserved in their manners; and those who, unlike Lord de Gray, have travelled little, are methinks blunt and homely in their speech. But you are more constant in your attachments, my Lord, than the gallants of France, who are even volatile as butterflies."

"Were inconstancy our character," said De Gray, "methinks no one who had once been attached to the Countess de Frontenaye could

again bestow a look of admiration upon any other woman."

He was sensible of the ungallantry of his observation; when the Princess, drawing herself up with an air of stiffness, replied—

"One fault we have ever observed in the English, even the best educated:—they are some deal too uncourtly in their manners, and want the polish which seems natural to the lowest Frenchman."

De Gray quickly perceived the error he had committed.

"'Tis a fault," said he, "inherent in our nature; but if our speech is blunt, and we lack the graces of French courtesy, our protestations may be the more easily credited; and your Royal Highness may believe me when I avouch, that, in my own rank of life, I have never met with the equal of the Countess.—There are," he added, looking timidly towards the Princess, "some whom destiny hath placed so far above us, that we can but regard them as we do the bright luminaries of heaven;—we feel

the influence of their beams, we bask in their rays, and we shiver when they are withdrawn from us ; but they are not in our sphere, — we worship, but we cannot approach them.”

The Princess gradually relaxed from her severity as De Gray spoke. She looked down, and sighed deeply. She thought, perhaps, of the probability that the cold barriers of royalty would for ever place themselves between her and true happiness ; or if, for a moment, she felt, as her ladies of honour pretended, a more lively interest than was befitting her rank, in the young English Earl, it was but a momentary weakness. She resumed their first topic of conversation. She spoke of the beauty and virtues of Gertrude ; praised the unchangeable sweetness of her disposition, which, said she, had almost disarmed envy amongst her companions ; and lamented the melancholy turn of her mind.

“ It is that very sadness,” said De Gray, “ which makes me doubtful of success. Her mind seems pre-occupied with some hidden grief, — some hopeless attachment.”

“Nay,” said the Princess, “I can nearly affirm that such is not the case. Ever since she came to our Court, the same melancholy demeanour hath distinguished her; though, sooth to say, it has of late greatly increased. Yet, courage, my Lord! A faithful and disinterested admirer—a loyal and *preux Chevalier*—may go far to cure her despondency: and her general disposition is so affectionate, that we cannot but believe her capable of appreciating your attachment.”

Thus encouraged, the Earl renewed his assiduities towards Gertrude; and Madame Catherine would frequently discourse to her of the merits and virtues of Lord de Gray, with so pointed an earnestness, that, had not her thoughts been pre-occupied, she must have perceived that the Princess was actuated by some hidden motive.

One morning, it was proposed by Madame Catherine, at her numerous-attended *lever*, that a lottery should be made of some of those jewels which, said she, were “tiresome to look

at." As she spoke, she displayed them before the admiring eyes of her ladies. There were massive gold chains, bracelets of exquisite workmanship, rings, earrings, carcanets, and every variety of jewelry. Among other articles, she carelessly threw on the table a small gold box, hanging by a black ribbon—

"Nay, Madam," said her Governess, in a remonstrating tone, "assuredly, your Royal Highness has not the intention of parting with that!"

"Pardon me," said the Princess, "I am more especially wearied of that ornament; and the notion of constantly wearing my brother's portrait may suit the Baron de Rosny, but not me: besides, the setting is antique;—the likeness striking, I confess; but I have another,—and, in short, I am resolved to rid myself of it. Sooth, the lady to whose lot it falls will have obtained the least tasteful gem of the collection."

They drew lots:—one obtained a diamond bracelet; another, a box of pearl rings; a third, a necklace of rubies; until the table was cleared of the glittering trinkets, with the exception of

a pair of diamond earrings and the picture. All had tried their fate but Gertrude and Mademoiselle de Tignonville, who regarded the earrings in trepidation, fearful of being unfortunate enough to draw the other prize. For once, Fortune favoured her votaries: Mademoiselle de Tignonville drew the earrings—Gertrude obtained the picture; and thought to herself, that, had all the jewels in the possession of all the crowned heads in Europe been laid at her feet, she would not have given it in exchange. Madame Catherine loudly lamented that so poor a prize had fallen to the lot of the Countess, and, whispering to her that she was the person for whom the diamond earrings were intended, blamed her own want of good management.

Lord de Gray had observed the emotion of joy, which, lighting up the features of Gertrude when she obtained the portrait, showed him that her beauty was capable of being increased. At once, the truth flashed upon his mind. She was the victim of a hopeless attachment. She

was in love with the King of Navarre! A pang of maddening jealousy shot through his brain. As soon could he have suspected an angel of erring as Gertrude de Frontenaye; but he reflected on the well-known character of Henry of Navarre,—on the immoral sentiments and conduct of the French court,—and he was distracted with the idea that she, whom he had considered as an angel among women, was perhaps but a weak and fallen mortal. He looked at Gertrude, and he despised himself for the thought; her innocent smile, the pure and holy light which shone in those dove-like eyes—he looked at her, and he banished the painful idea as sacrilegious. But he could bear suspense no longer; and he determined to know his fate.

As she was leaving the cabinet of the Princess, he approached her, and respectfully besought her to grant him a few minutes' conversation. She entered the antechamber with a sorrowful countenance, for she guessed the reason of his request.

“I come, Lady de Frontenaye,” said he, ‘to

learn my fate ;—there are griefs hard and bitter to be borne. Yet methinks, even when the blow is struck, it is less unbearable than torturing suspense. Seal then the doom of my mortal existence, — say to which extreme I am destined. Pronounce — whether am I to be driven forth an exile from Paradise, — a lonely wanderer over the face of the bleak world, — or to find here a haven of rest, and joy, and bliss? Say, Lady de Frontenaye, life or death, happiness or misery, joy inconceivable, or grief, the intense bitterness whereof my own heart alone can understand?”

“Wherein have I such power as you attribute to me?” said Gertrude. “Unfortunate myself, I am incapable of conferring happiness upon others.”

“If Heaven has sent misfortune to thee,” cried De Gray, “entrust me with the care of banishing it for ever from thee; if happiness has fled, be mine the gentle task to lure the wanderer back.”

“I have long feared this!” said Gertrude, thinking aloud. “I might,” said she, turning to De Gray, “descend to subterfuge. I might tell

you that my acquaintance with you is of too short a date to have permitted me to study your character, — that I have a disinclination to marry, that — but no, your generosity demands candour on my part. I cannot be your's, Lord de Gray — I love another."

"Oh God!" cried De Gray, in a tone of despair, "the cup of bliss is indeed dashed to the ground. I said that misfortune was less hard to bear than suspense. I spoke falsely. This, then, is the sad end of my solitary day-dreams! I pursue the phantom Happiness: I stretch out my arms to embrace her; and she eludes my grasp for ever. Pardon me, Madam, grief will have its way. Yet think not that I will weary you with my complaints. To-morrow I shall bid an eternal adieu to this country. Yet one word more — is there no hope?"

He stood with his lips parted, his face pale as death, big drops of perspiration upon his brow.

"Alas! alas!" said Gertrude. "Must I thus inflict the agony which I myself have endured? What shall I say to console you? How deceive you with false hopes? I love another.

My heart is not my own to give. Had it been——”

“Continue,” cried De Gray.

“*I would have been less wretched—you might have been happier.*”

“Alas!” said De Gray mournfully; “and must I feel the additional pang of knowing that I leave you in sorrow? Methinks the heart of woman must break under half the weight of the grief which now oppresses me. A fair and beauteous vision hath crossed my path, as if to render the journey through life darker and more desolate by contrast; yet would I not exchange the glimpse of Paradise which I have enjoyed for all the pleasures of my former life.—But say, may time remove thy sorrows?”

“My attachment,” said Gertrude, “is hopeless; yet time can have no power over it; a prophetic feeling which daily increases, and which I have neither power nor desire to combat, tells me that I have not long to live. I regret that, perhaps, one of the last acts of my existence has been to cause unhappiness to you.”

“Think not of me,” cried De Gray, moved even to tears — “think not of me. Great God! what am I, in comparison with one so angelic, that whilst we admire and love her, we tremble lest Heaven could not long spare her from its bright company! Speak not of me; but say, can my friendship be of service to you? Soul and body, behold me ready to devote both to you, now and for ever.”

“Alas!” said Gertrude, “your generosity but increases my grief. I cannot choose but weep when I think of the caprices of Fortune. My friendship is indeed yours; and yet there is perchance scarce one who would not have returned your attachment, had you chanced to fix it on any other object. If you would prove the strength and sincerity of your feelings for me, seek to obliterate all recollection of having ever loved me. Promise, for my sake, that you will not suffer an unmanly grief to prey upon your mind,—that you will exert all the resources which men possess, when they truly desire to combat the strength of an unhappy attachment.”

“ Pardon me,” said De Gray ; “ through life it shall be my glory to have loved you. I promise an entire resignation to my fate ; but, while I live, the remembrance of this hour shall be impressed on my memory. So far from feeling humbled by your refusal, I am raised in my own esteem by finding that I have excited your regrets and your sympathy. Would that I could add to my own grief the burden of yours !”

De Gray knelt before Gertrude. She stretched out her hand to him, and he bent over it to conceal his emotion. The Princess passed by the door of the antechamber at this moment : she rejoiced to see that Gertrude appeared to have granted a favourable answer to the suit of Lord de Gray. She was on the point of sealing up dispatches to the King of Navarre ; she added, in a postscript, “ Your Majesty will rejoice to hear that our lovely Countess, *La belle Proserpine*, is on the point of forming a suitable establishment. Lord de Gray, the English chevalier who saved her life and mine, has pro-

posed for her, and has been favourably received. I am determined that the nuptials shall be superb; but I must try to induce them to delay the ceremony till your Majesty's return; though, alas! royal authority has little weight against the superior power of the blind God. Your Majesty shall present her with the nuptial robes; for, if I mistake me not, she, of all my maids of honour, was most honoured by your notice. Would that peace were concluded! We sigh after the galliards, the ballets, and the pavans, which shall follow the *festin de nocces*."

Little deemed the thoughtless young Princess, as she threw herself upon a couch, her head filled with prospects of gaiety, that she had sealed the doom of her young favourite by a few careless words. Little thought Gertrude, as the courier who received the dispatches sprung upon his horse, blew his horn, and galloped past the window, that he unwittingly hastened the time when the last drop was to be poured into her cup of sorrow.

The Princess was filled with indignation when

she learnt that Lord de Gray had been refused by Gertrude, and was on the point of leaving France. She bitterly reproached Lady de Frontenaye, and accused Lord de Gray of lukewarmness in his attachment, since he could thus so easily abandon all hopes of inducing Gertrude to alter her resolution. She was still more surprised, when Lord de Gray humbly besought her not to importune Gertrude with solicitations in his behalf.

“The Virgin preserve me,” cried she, “from so lukewarm and patient an admirer !”

For three days after the departure of De Gray, she regarded the young Countess with an offended air, and bestowed all her favour upon Mademoiselle de Tignonville. Gertrude patiently awaited the return of her Royal Highness’s partiality for her; and could not help smiling internally, when one evening, forgetful of her anger, Madame Catherine flew into her room, habited only in her *manteau de nuit* and slippers, to inform her that Queen Marguerite de Valois had returned to Paris from Flanders;

had been met at Saint-Denis by the whole French Court ; that she had arrived in a litter, the pillars of which were covered with Spanish scarlet velvet embroidered in gold ; that she was accompanied by Madame de la Roche-sur-Zou, and by her lady of honour, Madame de Tournon ; by ten maids of honour on horseback, with their governess, and followed by six chariots containing the rest of her ladies ; and that, besides her maître d'hôtel, her equerries, and the noblemen of her household, she was escorted by the Cardinal de Lenancourt, the Count de Chaligny, the learned Bishop of Langres, and a numerous and magnificent retinue ; that she was habited in a *pourpoint* of silver tissue, and a kirtle of the same, embroidered in gold ; and that the balls which the Queen-Mother had given at Paris to celebrate her return, were equally gay and splendid. “ And were it not for these wearisome wars,” said the Princess, “ we should now be partaking in these superb fêtes.”

Gertrude endeavoured to console the Princess

for the magnitude of these privations, by prophesying a speedy termination to the war.

“ I could almost agree with *Chicot*,” said the Princess, laughing, “ who said to the King of Navarre, ‘ Certain am I, *Monsieur mon ami*, that thou wouldst be happy to throw in one lump both Papists and Huguenots to the Prothonotaries of Lucifer, an’ thou wert left in peace and tranquillity.’ ”

One day, Gertrude was informed that a holy man, dressed in the habit of an Augustine Monk, desired instant speech of her. On entering the room where he was seated, she was surprised by seeing brother Benedict, and eagerly advanced to bid him welcome.

“ I rejoice to see you, good father,” said she. “ How fares the good Father Anselmo ?”

“ Anselmo, my daughter,” answered the Monk, “ fares well. His righteous spirit doubtless receives the reward promised to the just man.”

“ Oh, Heaven !” cried Gertrude, “ is Anselmo dead ?”

“ Daughter, he is no more ! with his last breath he bequeathed to thee and to the young child his fervent benediction. His last prayer to Heaven was for thee — and the prayer of the righteous man availeth much. — Nay, weep not, daughter, we have lost our father,” added the Monk, brushing away a tear from his own eye — “ ay, and such a father shall our poor flock not find again in this world ! But he has gone to *his* Father, and, in companionship with the blessed saints, he forgets the sorrows which here fell to his lot. Soon after thy departure, he became ill, and, in a short while, it was easy to see the hand of death was upon him. He knew this ; but his courage and resignation failed him not. He continued to discharge his duties with the same earnestness — or even with a twofold zeal — ‘ for,’ said he, ‘ I have much to do, and but a short space to perform it in. The morrow is far spent ; the night cometh, in the which no man can work.’ ”

“ Alas !” said Gertrude, “ why was I not

informed of this beforehand ? I might have seen him once more before he died.”

“ It was his desire,” said the Monk, “ that no one should inform thee of his approaching dissolution. ‘ She has already suffered too much,’ said he, ‘ for one so young. Sorrow has blighted her young days ; but, when I am dead, I charge you, bear to her and to the orphan boy my parting blessing. Tell her to shed no tear for my death, but rather to rejoice that I have reached the harbour after a tempestuous voyage.—And tell her,’ added he, [and his eyes sparkled with a holy enthusiasm as he spoke, ‘ that did mankind know or understand the joy unspeakable which, at the last hour, fills the mind that can look back upon a well-spent life, there is no one who would, for a moment, hesitate to sacrifice the vain pleasures of this world in order to obtain that peace of mind at the hour of death.’ After his dissolution, three masses were sung for his departed soul. He was buried in his robes ; and, as his coffin was borne past the image of our blessed Madonna, me-

thought the Queen of Heaven smiled graciously. Others witnessed the miracle. When the ceremony was concluded, I set out on foot, to bear the sad tidings to thee. His successor is Brother Jerome, the nearest to him in age as in virtues."

With sincere grief Gertrude mourned for the death of her benefactor; and, as she again assumed her mourning dress, — "These," said she, "are the robes which methinks I should never have quitted. Gold, and silver, and gay colours, and bright flowers, are not for me."

Gertrude had often felt surprised that Preciosa had not yet claimed her promise of being present during the ceremony of her taking the veil. The following letter, which she received soon after the death of the Abbot, explained the reasons of her delay.

"AT length, dearest Gertrude, I am permitted to request your presence here. On the *fête* of Saint Benedict, our patron saint, I pronounce my vows, and throw on the veil which shall for

ever separate me from the world. The Lady-Abbess is an austere woman, but respectable in her severity. To her I confided the history of my sins and sorrows. When I had concluded, I observed that her eyes were filled with tears,—those eyes wearied with vigils and watchings, wept for me. She observed my surprise, and kindly taking me by the hand,—‘Daughter!’ said she, ‘you regard my tears with astonishment; but thinkest thou then, my child, that I am beyond the reach of human feeling? My eyes are sunken, my cheeks hollow, and my hair grey; but my heart beats yet. I have felt sorrow; *that* you may believe; for who upon earth is exempt from it? but you may look incredulous, when I confess to you, that I have felt and inspired affection. I loved, and was beloved; I was gay, young, confiding; I enjoyed the world and its pleasures—the gay dance, the galliard, was my delight. He whom I loved, to whom I was betrothed, was jealous of me, and without reason. In a fit of mingled sorrow and anger, I threw myself into a convent, and took the veil.

The anguish of heart and spirit wherewith I repented having taken this step, when it was irrevocable, no words can describe; but when I became abbess of this convent, I determined, remembering my own sufferings, that a certain period should elapse before I would permit any person entering this house to pronounce her vows. Now that I have heard your story, I cannot attempt to dissuade you from leaving a world where you can never again be happy; but I beseech of you, Señora, let a certain number of months elapse, before you decide. Remember, the veil is like the grave,—once assumed, it covers you for ever.

“ My time of probation has expired. Were you happy, I should not have asked you to leave a scene of gaiety for one of sadness. As it is, if it costs you a moment’s regret to leave Bearne,—I am not exacting,—you will visit me at some other period. They tell me that *he* flies from victory to victory,—that he endures hardships which the strongest constitution might sink under,—that he exposes his person like a private

soldier, distinguished by his dress, so as to be a mark for the fury of the enemy. In the day-time, I banish his image. Prayers, and hymns, and charitable works, occupy our time, and I endeavour to prevent the recollection of former days from hovering between Heaven and me ; but in the solitude of my cell, his figure rises before me. I see him, mounted on his Sardinian war-horse, — I see the snowy plume waving in the breeze. I hear his voice, encouraging his troops to victory. Suddenly, a random bullet, fired by some obscure hand, strikes him in the midst of his career. He falls, — the hope of France ! Stretched in the dust, panting, breathless, — the dews of death o'erspread that noble brow. I hear the cry of woe spreading from rank to rank ; and when the morning light breaks in, dispelling the waking visions of the night, I look round fearfully, and contrast the calm of a sunshiny morning, the peaceful loveliness of nature, and the quiet that reigns throughout my humble cell, with the wild storm which rages in my breast. Oh ! for the calm fearless-

ness of innocence which I once experienced, when, wandering with the poor Bohemians, forming one of a race of outcasts despised by the civilized world, I yet dared to look serenely on the majestic heavens, to listen with wonder and delight to the raging storm; when I shrunk not before the lightning's flash, and fearlessly listened to the rolling thunder. Yet even as I write, I fix my eyes upon the consoling words which are written below an image of the Madonna.—

‘ Si de la robe d’Innocence
Vous avez souillé la blancheur,
Un baptême nouveau va s’offrir au pécheur—
C’est celui de la pénitence.
De l’un à l’autre, hélas ! quelle est la différence !—
Là, tout sans peine,—ici, rien sans douleur.’

“ Adieu: the bell tolls for vespers, and the nuns silently glide through the trees towards the chapel, like a procession of phantoms, now hidden by the foliage, and now their black robes appearing through the vista. Once more, adieu. As I am called here by the holy sisterhood, so I

sign myself to you ; and that Heaven may give thee well to fare is the hope of

“ SISTER LEONISA.”

Gertrude, though almost fearing a refusal from the Princess, who again appeared to have become passionately fond of her, and loaded her with every mark of kindness, as if to obliterate the remembrance of her shortlived anger, repaired to her cabinet, in order to request the permission of her Royal Highness to absent herself from Court for a few days. She made her request at a fortunate moment. The Princess dictated a letter to her secretary, gave orders for the trimming of a train, scolded her maitre d'hôtel, and laughed with Madame de Tignonville, at one and the same instant. It was reported that the Queen of Navarre proposed joining her at Bearne, and she arranged a *fête* for her arrival ; but the same courier brought her intelligence of the death of Madame de la Roche-sur-Zou, who being of the blood-royal, and aunt to Queen Margaret, it was ne-

cessary for the Court to go into mourning. It was decided that violet-colour was to be the external mark of woe for the death of the Princess; and Madame Catherine rejoiced in the assurances of her milliner, that violet-colour was *bien flatteuse* to her complexion.

Two days before her death, Madame de la Roche-sur-Zou had requested an interview with Marguerite de Valois. That Princess presented herself in her usual magnificent costume, which, we are told, was equally elegant and immodest.

“Madam,” said the dying lady, sadly fixing her eyes upon her, “you see in me an example sent by God for your edification—think of it, I beseech you. To this end must we all come. As I am this day, so will you be sooner or later. Ah! think of this, and withdraw from the chamber of death—for now I must fix my thoughts upon God!—and when I look at you, I can but recall to my mind the world and its vanities!”

When Gertrude found it possible to proffer her request to Madame Catherine, the Princess,

having no leisure to recollect the thousand reasons which, at any other moment, she would have found to prevent her departure, granted her the permission she desired; and, beseeching her to return in time for the representation of an Italian comedy, which was to take place within a short period, offered her two equeries as an escort: — “And, for your own riding,” added she, “you are welcome to the white palfrey which my brother of Navarre presented to me on my last birth-day; that is, if you are a spirited horsewoman, — for, by the five joys of our blessed Lady! it is too mettlesome for my riding, and had well nigh lodged our royal person in the Adour, not very long since. — But, talking of the King of Navarre,” added the Princess, “methinks I have forgotten to deliver to you a packet which arrived this morning to your address. Ay, here it is, ‘For the Countess Frontenaye,’ and sealed with the Navarre crest. Retire to your chamber, and read the contents, for, sooth to say, the countenance of our secretary assumes a dark

and angry aspect, at having been so long delayed."

Gertrude gladly availed herself of the permission to withdraw from the apartment. She entered her chamber, drew the bolts, and stood with the letter in her hand, and the seal unbroken, though assuredly she could not guess its contents. She opened it at length, and read as follows:—

"WE congratulate the Countess of Frontenaye upon her approaching nuptials, and cannot doubt the merit of the chevalier who has so soon taken captive the heart which so long disdained to wear fetters. Promises, then, are light things; oaths, mere words of *convenience*. Sooth, I am not over forward to give credence to the good faith of a woman; yet there be some who put on the form of angels to deceive our weak humanity, and we say to ourselves, 'Can angels speak falsely?' Methinks there should be a talisman whereby to discover truth from imposture. You are now released from your

promise ; and thus terminate my vain dreams. How, indeed, could I simply believe that the young and fair lady of Frontenaye should, for my sake, have remained in sad celibacy ? Yet, triumph not in the idea of having broken my heart,—I am not one to pine because deserted. I wish you all happiness, Madame ; but I pray you wave the compliment of delaying the ceremony for my sake. A rude soldier cannot grace your wedding ; and there is many a courtly gallant who may better suit your taste. It is a revenge worthy of a woman. I who deceived you under a false name, merit in return to meet with a false heart. I return your tress of hair, which I no longer value ; 'twas a sharp pang, but it is past ; — that soft, sunny lock ! little deemed I so soon to part with it. I would ask your object in having so deceived me ; but perchance the response would simply be, ‘ Beauties are capricious.’—Adieu, Madame : commend me to the Lord de Gray, I beseech you.

“ HENRY.”

Gertrude's first emotion was indignant surprise ; her second, the strong desire of immediately justifying herself to King Henry ; but the reflection of a few hours caused her to alter this resolution. For the first time, her eyes were opened to the full danger of the promise which she had made to the King of Navarre, and she easily foresaw, that he who assumed all the rights of a jealous lover would never be satisfied with mere friendship. After a long and calm deliberation with herself, she felt assured that her own welfare, and the peace of mind of King Henry, demanded her retirement from Court ; and she determined to take advantage of his error, by banishing herself for ever from his presence.

“ If,” thought she, “ my feelings do not deceive me, and that the hour of my death is not far distant, surely it is befitting that my time should be employed in preparing for that great change. It is not in the midst of these gaieties, — it is not in thus making idols of the things of this world, that I can fit myself for a better.

He releases me from a promise which I should never have made. Hitherto I have been vainly secure in my own innocence, consoling myself with the reflection, that had he not, as Duke of Beaumont, won my affections, I never could have loved him. But if my attachment was then innocent, it became guilty from the hour in which he first became discovered to me as the King of Navarre. I have been weak, inconsiderate ; but, thanks be to Heaven ! I have discovered my error, and at a moment when it is in my own power to remedy it. In a short while, he will learn his mistake, and will perhaps regret it ; by that time, I shall have returned to my former seclusion, which no power shall again induce me to abandon ; and in a short, a very short period, he will perchance forget that I ever existed."

A sudden change appeared to have been wrought upon Gertrude ; her appearance of depression had fled ; a melancholy light yet shone in her eyes ; but mingled with it was an air of calm exaltation. She felt within her

mind the tranquillity which ever follows a virtuous resolution, however great the sacrifice may be. She wrote a few lines to the King of Navarre, and enclosed them to the Duchess of Montbazon, with a request that they should be given to King Henry after her departure. She gave to the Duchess a short explanation of her conduct, and communicated to her her firm resolution of returning to Frontenaye, never again to quit it. To King Henry she wrote thus :—

“ BY the time you receive this, you will have learned your error with respect to me, and will assuredly regret the terms of your letter. But, believe me, it has been wisely ordered. For the first time, a film seems withdrawn from before my eyes, and I clearly see that I was heedlessly pursuing a path, the termination of which was sin and sorrow. That violence of feeling which dictated your Majesty's letter would have broken out upon a thousand other occasions; yet in this matter I have but one

fault wherewith to charge you. Knowing me as you did, you should have disbelieved every report to my disadvantage ; yet, I repeat, it is better as it is. The plan of friendship which I traced out to myself was visionary. My continued residence at Court would but have disturbed your peace of mind, and rendered you more discontented with your domestic situation, whilst a thousand circumstances must have conspired to render me wretched. Do not then lament what has passed. I return to the solitude which I should never have quitted ; and it is my earnest request, as you value my esteem and friendship, that you will abstain from seeing or writing to me. A contrary line of conduct would only oblige me to seek another dwelling. I rely upon your promise of becoming a second father to Edward. I have no higher wish for him than that he may make your Majesty his model through life, avoiding the imperfections which prevent you from being the standard of all that is good and great. I dare not trust myself to write more ; I might

say too much ; and I require all my fortitude at this moment. Believe me, it is not without a sigh that I look forward to the prospect of never again beholding you. And yet I see before me no prospect of long and dreary years. I trust in Heaven's mercy for shortening the period of my earthly probation.—Adieu ! Believe me, that the world contains no one who more sincerely prays for your welfare, here and in a brighter world, than

“ GERTRUDE DE FRONTENAYE.”

CHAPTER XI.

Peace to thy broken heart, and virgin grave !

BYRON.

IT was on a soft and beautiful autumnal day, when summer yet lingered, as if regretting to yield her throne to the melancholy season which usurps her place, that Gertrude, escorted by two écuyers, accompanied by her waiting-woman, and mounted on the spirited white horse of the Princess of Navarre, left the confines of Bearne, and directed her route towards Beaume-les-Dames, in Franche-Comté, where the convent of Preciosa was situated. As she rode along, so bright a flush was upon her cheek, her eyes shone with so radiant a

light, while her sunny auburn hair blew in the breeze like golden waves; her whole air had in it something so exalted and beautiful, — that many a passing traveller stopped to gaze upon her with wonder and admiration; and a young peasant declared, in his rapture, that he beheld rays encircling her like a glory. Her heart beat with an unaccountable violence: she could almost hear its wild throbbing. She could not distinguish her own feelings; but as the horse galloped along, leaving behind it villages and churches, orchards and vineyards, she felt raised above the earth, and hardly knew whether happiness or sorrow filled her heart. They met a funeral procession, and the horse of Gertrude started aside, and wheeled round with violence, at which Pierrine, the waiting-girl, shrieked loudly, and the *écuyers* muttered as they crossed themselves, “A bad omen, sure enough, to begin a journey with!” They galloped on, but still they could hear the melancholy death-hymn, to which the horses’ hoofs clattered with a kind of measured cadence.

They rode along by the banks of the lovely Adour, through scenes of the wildest magnificence—smiling valleys, gardens, orchards, and vine-clad hills, stretched out in beautiful variety as far as the eye could reach. It was a monotony of beauty, relieved by the animated appearance of the pretty peasant-girls, as they smilingly held up their baskets filled with cherries, and besought Gertrude to accept of them.

They halted for the night at a small village, and recommenced their journey by daybreak. Through a continuation of beautiful and varied scenery, they reached the town of Dole, situated upon a hill richly clad with vines. To the east, the forest of Chaulx, supposed to be the most extensive in France, stretched out to the distance of twenty miles; and behind arose the Monts de Salins, and the lofty Jura; while still farther off, Mont Blanc, like a white cloud, shone in the distant horizon. The smiling meadows, intersected by rivers and canals; the majestic forest, crowned by lofty mountains; the beautiful village of Azans, embosomed in

wood, its ancient church gleaming through the foliage, — formed a scene at once varied and lovely. The architecture of the town was irregular; but its magnificent situation, lofty churches and vast buildings, its hospitals, colleges, and convents, gave to it an imposing air of grandeur and beauty.

They passed by the beautiful and limpid fountain of La Forestière, at the foot of Mount Orlando. A group of young girls dressed in white moved in procession towards the sparkling waters: their heads were crowned with garlands of bright pink roses, and they sang verses in honour of the Virgin Mary. It was the ancient procession “Des Pucelles,” which took place every Easter Monday, and which is still preserved to a certain extent. The Doloise girls presented to Gertrude, as she passed, freshly-culled bouquets of white roses and violets.

They passed by the ancient convent of the Munines and the village of Rochefort. Here the road became narrow and precipitous, and

descended into a deep declivity, where the horses stumbled over large stones and pieces of rock. As they descended slowly and with difficulty, a bright flash of lightning, which illuminated the whole valley, gave token of an approaching storm. The sky became dark and lowering, the thunder roared above their heads, and the rain dashed down in torrents. No habitation seemed near: Pierrine trembled with fear and crossed herself, and looked with wonder on the serene countenance of Gertrude, who rode on fearlessly and seemingly unconscious of danger. At length darkness surrounded them on all sides, and one of the equerries, riding forward, declared that they had wandered from the high road.

Gertrude roused herself from her reverie, and consulted with her escort as to what plan it was most advisable for them to pursue. They listened in hopes of hearing human sounds; but the hollow roar of a distant torrent alone struck their ear. The storm increased with frightful violence, and they continued to de-

scend a precipitous path which seemed like the entry to some frightful chasm.

At length, one of the grooms dismounting, threw the reins to his companion, and, recommending them to remain stationary till his return, proceeded on foot to discover whether any hut could be seen, which might afford them a night's shelter. He returned in a few minutes, with the joyful intelligence that he perceived a light shining in the direction of the torrent, and had no doubt that it proceeded from some solitary cottage. Reanimated by this intelligence, the travellers proceeded in the direction which he pointed out to them, and at length arrived at the door of a mean-looking house built on the brink of the torrent, from one of the windows of which streamed a welcome light. They knocked loudly; the door was cautiously opened by an old man, who, holding a lantern in his hand, held it up to have a view of the equestrians; and as he so did, discovered a countenance so dark and ferocious, that the grooms looked at one another

with faces expressive of distrust; and Gertrude thought in her own mind, that she would rather have braved the storm, than entered this suspicious-looking dwelling.

“A wet night, my masters,” said the old man in a fawning tone, as he assisted them to dismount. “You have done well in coming to the *Cabaret Rouge*, where there is good accommodation both for man and beast.—Here, Genevieve, come and assist the ladies.”

Genevieve, who quickly answered to the call, was endowed with a physiognomy even more repellent than that of her husband. They entered a miserable and dirty kitchen; and, as they gathered round the ashes of an expiring wood-fire, they had leisure to observe the interior of the dwelling, and the appearance of its inmates.

A small lamp shed a dark and doubtful light through the room. The family appeared to consist of the landlord and his wife, two sons, whose lawless and fierce expression gave them the appearance of brigand chiefs, a tawdrily

dressed daughter, enveloped in dirty finery, with a pair of large diamond earrings, and a topaz cross; and a negro-woman of swarthy complexion and sinister appearance, who seemed to act in the capacity of servant to the establishment.

“By ’r Lady,” whispered one of the grooms of Pierrine, who stood trembling equally with cold and fear, “they look as an’ they had just returned from robbing an altar.”

His suspicion increased when, as Gertrude took off her glove, and the lamp flashed upon her fingers, which were covered with valuable rings, he observed a quick glance of intelligence pass between the daughter and her mother. Gertrude requested the hostess to show her the chamber where she was to pass the night. The old man declared, with many expressions of regret, that the two écuyers must sleep upon straw in a shed or outhouse adjoining to the inn, all their apartments being occupied except a miserable garret above the kitchen, which might suit the lady, and a dark closet off it,

where a mattress would be stretched for the tirewoman.

The spirits of Pierrine revived upon hearing that there were other travellers in the house; and the landlady proceeded to conduct the Countess and her maid to their apartment. It was a chill, dark garret, in which was a miserable bed with flock curtains; and an adjoining closet of equally unprepossessing aspect. No sooner had the landlady left the room, than Pierrine, suddenly falling upon her knees before Gertrude, drew her attention to a long stream of blood issuing from a door which she had not before perceived. For some moments, Gertrude regarded it in trembling silence. Pierrine knelt and crossed herself, and, with a faltering voice, muttered prayers over her rosary.

“Pierrine!” said Gertrude in a low voice, “rouse yourself; let us, without showing suspicion, return to the kitchen, inform the landlady of the circumstance, and demand an explanation of it. Surely, Heaven will inspire us how to act in this conjuncture.”

As she spoke, she took the lamp in her hand,

and, followed by Pierrine, descended the narrow staircase, and knocked at the door of the room they had first entered. A dead silence succeeded to a low hum of voices, and, after a few moments, the negro-woman opened the door. Gertrude, with as firm a voice as she could command, explained the reason of her appearance. The negro-woman burst into a fiendish laugh; the old man came forward, and informed Gertrude, that the garret joined on to an old barn frequently employed as a slaughter-house, and that he had killed a goat there that very morning, which accounted for the stream of blood. The hostess advanced and apologized for the occurrence; and Gertrude endeavoured to tranquillize her fears.

“No traveller,” said the woman, “ever complained of his treatment in our house, or went away dissatisfied.”

“Or found fault with his accommodation,” added one of the sons, casting a glance of doubtful meaning at Gertrude, from under his lowering brows.

They returned to the garret, and Gertrude

endeavoured to reason away her fears, but in vain; however, she put on a cheerful countenance in the presence of Pierrine, who stretched herself to rest upon the mattrass in the adjoining closet, and in a short time fell fast asleep. Gertrude threw herself upon a couch without undressing. The night continued stormy and lowering, and ever as the lightning flashed into the room, it shone upon the mysterious stream of blood, and once, Gertrude fancied that a stifled groan proceeded from the barn; then again all was silent but the hoarse roar of the torrent, and the moaning of the wind, till a clap of thunder would shake the miserable dwelling to its foundation.

“In such a night,” thought Gertrude, “methinks the hardened murderer must tremble. Surely no guilty deed could be performed amid these awful and appalling sounds.”

Hardly had she concluded the reflection, when the door of her apartment was softly opened, and the negro-woman entered, a lamp in her hand, and a small dagger stuck in her girdle.

Gertrude had no power either to move or breathe; she lay in silent horror, watching the movements of the murderess. She advanced softly, held up the lamp as if examining the apartment, stopped in an attitude of listening, looked towards the closet, then towards the bed where Gertrude lay, as if in hesitation; then suddenly approached Gertrude, her lamp held back, her dagger in her hand, her countenance expressive of determined ferocity. Gertrude uttered a stifled cry, and with a momentary strength exclaimed—

“Pierrine, Pierrine! save thyself! God of mercy, to thy care I commend my spirit!”

Hardly had she made the ejaculation, and with her hands clasped, her eyes shut, awaited the fatal blow, when another figure appeared behind the Negress,—a firm hand plunged a long *couteau-de-chasse* into her bosom, and, with a loud and savage yell, she fell bathed in her blood. It was long before Gertrude recovered from the state of insensibility into which she fell at this moment. When she did recover

Pierrine was bending over her, the body of the Negress was removed, and all was still in the fearful *cabaret rouge*. In a word Pierrine explained what had happened. The two *écuyers*, feeling suspicious of the character of their hosts, after pretending to retire to rest in the adjoining outhouse, softly left their concealment. One of them posted himself at the door of the kitchen, and listened to the discourse of those within, and thus learnt their plan of operations. It was agreed that the Negress should murder the Countess, while the hostess and her daughter watched at the door, to render assistance if needful ; that they should then dispatch the waiting-woman, and throw the two bodies into the barn, or (slaughter-house as the Negress called it, with a horrid sneer) ; that, in the mean time, the old man and his sons should proceed to put an end to the two servants in the out-house ; that a division of the spoil should then be made, and a certain share given to those whom they expected to sup with them after the murders. Finding that more

ruffians were expected, the equerries concluded that they had no time to lose. One of them crept up to the door of the garret where the Countess and her maid lay, and, armed with his *couteau-de-chasse*, concealed himself behind some bundles of faggots. The other boldly walked into the kitchen where they sat with a hot supper and flagons of wine, and, feigning not to perceive the surprise and embarrassment caused by his presence, declared that thirst had prevented him from sleeping, that he came to crave a little milk, but rejoiced to see they had better fare. He saw the old Negress rise from the table, followed by the hostess and her daughter, and carried his dissimulation so far as to pay the girl some compliments in passing, upon the tasteful elegance of her dress. He heard them turn the key on the outside of the door, and he was left with the three men. He walked up and down the room for some minutes, drank a cup of wine, and sang snatches of a drinking-song; then, suddenly drawing a pair of loaded pistols from beneath his cloak, he

discharged them at the two brothers with a sure aim, rushed upon the old man, and plunged a hunting-knife into his breast. Then, bursting open the door, he met his comrade who was descending the staircase, and dragging after him the two wretched women. They bound them with strong cords to the beams which supported the roof of the house, tied handkerchiefs over their mouths, to prevent their cries, and then, fearful of new dangers, reloaded their pistols, barricaded the door, and remained there upon the watch.

“And they are still watching there,” said Pierrine, sobbing hysterically,—“but for two hours all has been silent.”

At this dreadful recital, Gertrude rose from the bed, and, sinking on her knees, solemnly gave thanks to God for their wonderful deliverance. She then, accompanied by Pierrine, descended the staircase, in order to thank her brave deliverers. It was midnight, when a loud knocking at the door fearfully broke in upon the stillness.

“Let us in,” cried a hoarse voice, “we have had a good night’s work. Have ye any travellers?”

Receiving no answer, they knocked again; but all was silent.

“We want wine, and the foul murrain take ye!” cried another voice.

“Are ye drunk or asleep?” said a third with a horrible oath.

“Have ye murdered each other, that ye answer not?” cried another with a frightful laugh. “A thousand curses light upon ye, keeping us standing out in this howling night!”

At length a sudden panic seemed to come over the robbers; and they retreated, muttering curses, mixed with ejaculations of fear and wonder.

Gertrude and her small retinue continued watching at the door, till the beams of morning began to stream through the windows. It was agreed that the Countess should proceed on her journey, with Pierrine and one of the equerries, and that the other should give notice at

Rochefort of what had happened. Having bestowed a handsome reward upon these brave men, Gertrude silently mounted her horse, and the travellers speedily abandoned this scene of horror. After an hour's hard riding, they found themselves upon the high road, which they had missed the preceding night. It was a balmy and beautiful morning, but the travellers were hardly in a frame of mind to enjoy its beauty.

They reached Thoraise, a little valley situated in Franche-Comté, about three leagues from Besançon. They rode by the side of the foaming river of the Doubs, which, as if desirous of escaping from its confinement between two chains of rocky mountains, flows rapidly and throws its sparkling foam against the precipice. At length the river gradually becomes wider, and flows majestically through a smiling valley, the fertility and beauty of which formed a striking contrast with the surrounding mountains. Gardens, vineyards, and orchards, were stretched out in brilliant fertility, as far as the eye could reach. Leaving this valley, their

road wound round at the foot of a mountain, and, through the dark and mysterious foliage of the trees which covered it, they perceived immense masses of rock, which, shaking from their foundation, seemed ready to fall on the head of the devoted traveller. They came to a mighty fragment, which, detached from the mountain, attested the reality of their danger. They left behind them the pretty village of Velote, situated on the banks of the river, and standing, like a bright and solitary flower, in the midst of a desert. The eye, fatigued with the smiling beauty of the scenery, wandered over rich corn-fields, meadows, smiling villages, solitary hamlets, castles, and vine-clad hills. They perceived a group of pilgrims, of all sexes and ages, toiling up the mountain, at the summit of which was situated the celebrated chapel of *Notre-Dame-du-Monde*, whose miracles were said to reward the zeal of her pious votaries.

It was on the dark and gloomy evening of a sultry day that they reached Baume-les-Dames,

where the convent of Preciosa was situated. It was a handsome edifice, built on the brow of a hill. It was founded towards the fourteenth century by Saint Germain : none but those of noble birth were allowed to enter it.

An immense crowd was pressing towards the abbey church. The equerry inquired the cause of the unusual bustle that prevailed.

“ You are a stranger, my friend,” said the man whom he addressed, “ or you would know that the Marchioness of Villabella, a noble Spanish lady of the Geraldini family, is this night to pronounce her vows in the abbey church.”

As he spoke, the deep toll of the convent-bell was heard, and a full-toned swell of harmony came pealing along the body of the splendid edifice, in which the sublime notes of the organ were mingled with the soft voices of the nuns.

“ We are late,” said Gertrude in a low voice, as she reached the gates ; and, dismissing her attendants, she entered the church alone.

She wore the mourning-dress which she had not relinquished since the death of the Abbot. Her white veil was thrown back, and her countenance, which seemed to be flushed with excitement, was so beautiful, that, as she entered, a low murmur of admiration filled the church. She passed on, her feelings almost overwhelmed by the sublimity of the scene which presented itself. The long aisles and lofty arches were lighted up by the mysterious glow of a thousand lamps, while the faint and exquisite odours of frankincense and myrrh steeped the senses in delight, and entranced the soul in a profound and holy fervour. The dim light shone upon the marble columns, as they rose loftily, and were lost in the richly-carved roof, and lighted up the faint beauty of the sculptured Madonna, and concentrated its rays in one splendid blaze upon the high altar, illuminating the silver crucifix, the jewels, and the holy censer. Before an illuminated missal stood the Bishop, arrayed in superb robes; and upon the altar lay the habit, veil, and ring of the young and beautiful candidate.

The Lady-abbess and the holy sisterhood knelt around the altar, — Preciosa, in the habit of a novice, somewhat in advance of the other nuns. The organ pealed forth the solemn anthem—
“Light thy lamp, and keep it burning; lo! the bridegroom comes to meet thee;” and the sweet harmony of female voices mingling with its loftier tones, filled the church with divine melody.

On the entrance of Gertrude, Preciosa looked up. Her face was pale and calm; the wild and restless expression of her eye had fled, and her beauty had in it something inexpressibly sublime. She gave one glance of grateful recognition to Gertrude; and then, fixing her eyes on the bright crucifix, seemed lifted above all worldly thoughts, and wholly occupied by the solemn ceremony in which she was engaged. The anthem concluded, she was conducted by the Abbess towards the Bishop, and, kneeling down before him, received his benediction. Then again the organ pealed forth a solemn strain. Advancing to the golden censer, the Bishop sprinkled the habit which lay upon the

altar with holy water, and presented it to Preciosa. She arose from her knees, and, retiring from the altar, returned clad in her new garment. Meanwhile, Gertrude stood leaning against a pillar, overpowered with emotion. No one who saw her on this eventful night ever forgot the expression of her countenance. "She looked," said one of the nuns, "like a spirit trying to break the bonds of its mortal control." Her lips were parted; her hands clasped, and her eye bright and wandering. There was silence throughout the church.

Preciosa knelt on the steps of the altar, and the venerable Bishop stood before her. She raised her splendid voice, and sang the *Ancilla Christi sum*. It rose like a strain of unearthly melody; now dying away amongst the distant echoes — now floating in clear harmony; and then again it sank — and all was silence. A low convulsive sob was heard as the hymn concluded. The Bishop took the veil, and Preciosa received the emblem of her separation from the world. He placed the ring upon her finger, and she became the bride of Heaven.

He pronounced, in a loud and firm voice, an eternal anathema against all who, being wedded to the Saviour, shall break these holy vows; and, as if to render his words more impressive, a loud peal of thunder was heard, and vivid lightning played round the altar. The ceremony was ended; the bride of Heaven rose from her knees; the nuns moved on in solemn procession; the organ struck forth a solemn hallelujah! and the thunder pealed in awful chorus.

Suddenly, a cry was heard, like the last effort of a broken heart—like the agony of a wounded spirit. They hurried towards the spot from whence it came. Gertrude lay prostrate and motionless at the foot of the marble pillar. They raised her up; they bathed her pale and lovely face—lovely even in death; but it would not do,—it would not do! With that last strain of harmony, the immortal soul had fled for ever!

THE END.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.





The new British Novelist comprising works by the most popular and fashionable writers of the present day

Bd.: 30. Gertrude. Vol. 2

London [ca. 1835]

P.o.angl. 251 d-30

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10747955-3